GOD
070.92
Vol I / Pic
106368

00106368

00106368

Digitized with financial assistance from
Shri Brihad Bhartiya Samaj
on 31 October, 2019

CASSELL'S COLONIAL LIBRARY

PICTURES OF MANY WARS

This Edition is printed for circulation in the Colonies and India only.

Yours
Frederick Villiers

Photo: MacMahon, Inverness.

PICTURES

OF

MANY WARS

B1434

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

BY

FREDERIC VILLIERS

106368

GOD

070.92

Vil/Pic

10 6368

WITH PORTRAIT FRONTISPIECE
AND SEVEN FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK
AND MELBOURNE. MCMII

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

To my Wife

CONTENTS.

I.

PAGE

I MEET ARCHIBALD FORBES AND SEE MY FIRST BATTLE 1
The Father of the Man—My Training as an Artist—An Epoch-making Event—Marching Orders—Archibald Forbes—My Baptism of Fire.

II.

A RED CROSS INCIDENT 11
"The Hoof of the Turkish Horse"—Among the Wounded—An Uncouth Colleague—What I Said of Him—Red Cross Heroines—Dr. MacKellar's Quarters—A Death that Came Home to Me.

III.

SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS 22
I go over to the Turks—Frank Power—A Turkish Citadel—"Ze Cleverest Dragoman in all ze Turkey"—What he did for us—Constantinople—Colonel Valentine Baker—My Sea-Captain and his *Firman*—What it was to be an Englishman in Turkey—Barrington Kennet and his Servian Servant—Hafuz Pasha—Face to Face with Mine Enemy—A Policy of Bluff and Guile—It is Crowned with Success.

IV.

QUESTIONABLE QUARTERS 38
Colonel Smyter, V.C.—"My Little Lot"—A Warm Welcome—Cholera!—A Ghastly Journey.

V.

"DEAD HORSE PICKET" 46
The Resourceful Gaylor—A Sinister-Looking Mount—A Scarecrow Skeleton—The "Picket"—Tommy Atkins and the Fig-trees—The Mystery of the Mare.

VI.

PAGE

WHY I BECAME A SHOPWALKER 55
My Swedish Friend—I Serve in His Store—I am Guilty of *Lèse Majesté*—Odessa—A Russo-Scot.

VII.

MY FRIEND CORPORAL DUNBAR 63
The Eve of Tamai—My Friend Corporal Dunbar—He does me a Good Turn—Herbert Stewart—The Battle—Bennet Burleigh—*Sergeant* Dunbar—*Lieutenant* Dunbar—The Good Turn I Owed Him.

VIII.

"PLAYING PETER" 73
The Greco-Turkish War—Greek Valour—Volo—Kinnaird Rose—The Stampede to Larissa—I Keep the Gates of the British Consulate—A Greek Falstaff—The Consul and the Nurses—An English Volunteer—The Greek and his Revolver.

IX.

HOW WE SAVED VOLO 83
Campaigning in Clover—Our Mission to the Turks—An International Enterprise—An Anxious Moment—Were the Greeks Playing Fair?—All's Well that Ends Well.

X.

THE VICISSITUDES OF A WEEK 89
I.—THE BANQUET.—With the Russians in 1877—The Czarevitch—A Great Feast—My Provoking Sobriety—"British Drink for the Englishman"—I Succumb—A Sobering Incident.
II.—THE BIVOUAC.—*En Route* to Plevna—Cold Welcome and Short Rations—A Meal at Last—A Franco-Russian.
III.—THE BATTLE.—The Order to Advance—Forbes' Advice—A Pause in the Fight—The Russians are Repulsed—The Remnant of a Regiment—Osman the Indolent—My Death.

XI.

THE DEATH TRAMP OF THE TURKISH PRISONERS . . 118
Great Wars and Cruel Winters—A Memorable Sleigh-ride—A Terrible Sight—Our Russian Host—A Dandy with a Heart—Prison and Pestilence—A Reluctant Angel.

XII.

PAGE

FACT AND FANCY 127

The Mudir of Dongola—A Glowing Picture—"Curly" Hutton—A Quaint Fleet—And a Quaint March—The Mudir as I Found Him.

XIII.

A BRUSH WITH OSMAN DIGNA 135

A Quick Journey—Bennet Burleigh Looks Ahead—The Advance on El Teb—The Last of Some Old Friends—The Battle—Colonel Burnaby—His Political "Platform"—The Arab Retreat—Baker Pasha and the 10th Hussars—A Curious Incident—Major Cholmondeley Turner—Rum and Asparagus.

XIV.

SKOBELEFF'S CHARGER 150

The Russians at San Stefano—The Great MacGahan—A Visit to Skobeleff—Skobeleff and the Turks—His Affection for MacGahan—What Makes Men Fight—Bad News of MacGahan—I Ride to Constantinople on Skobeleff's Charger—MacGahan's Death.

XV.

WRECKED! 158

From Bayuda to Korti—My "Contrairy" Camel—I Arrive on Foot—Lord Wolseley and the Desert Column—*En Voyage* for Dongola—We are Wrecked—My Sensations—I am Saved by Soudanese.

XVI.

I AM TAKEN PRISONER 169

The Third Attack on Plevna—I Try to Distance my Rivals—I am Placed *Hors de Combat*—A Prisoner—My American Friends are Amused—He Laughs Best Who Laughs Last.

XVII.

BERESFORD'S BAPTISM 175

Arabi's Rebellion—The Egyptian Soldier of Those Days—His One Military Accomplishment—I am Invited on Board the *Condor*—Beresford's Gallantry—I am the Bearer of Exciting News—A Jovial Little Party—The *Condor's* Orders—"If an Opportunity Should Occur"—The Opportunity Occurs—"Well Done, *Condor!*"

XVIII.

PAGE

WEIRD TROPHIES 188

The Bulgarian Atrocities—A Visit to the Balkans—My Guide Abdullah—Batac—An Uncanny Commission—My Superstitious Fears—*Post Hoc, Propter Hoc?*

XIX.

TEL-EL-KEBIR 199

An Invitation to Dine with the Guards—I Find my Hosts Flown—I Follow in Pursuit—The Night March—The Black Watch—Lieutenant Rawson, R.N.—The Battle—A Touching Incident—Daybreak—My Prodigal Pony.

XX.

A VISIT TO NEGUS JOHN 210

Sir William Hewitt's Mission—How to Get Attached to it?—Mason Bey—His Solution of My Problem—Adowa and its Inhabitants—My Worcester Sauce Bottle—What it Won for Me—His Majesty the Negus Negusti.

XXI.

I GUIDE THE GUIDES 219

Wigram-Battye and Pollock Hamilton—The "Khokies"—My Pony and his Luminous Tail—A Successful Little Fight.

XXII.

FOR GORDON'S SAKE 226

A Narrow Escape—Nile or Crocodile?—My New Rig-out—Stewart's Brigade—The Camel and His Little Ways—The March Across the Desert—Stewart Wounded—Gubat—Gordon's Doom—"Too Late!"

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

FREDERICK VILLIERS . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"'MR. FORBES, I BELIEVE?'" . . . . . *To face p.* 4

"'SIR, WHO ARE YOU?'" . . . . . „ 18

"BRITISH DRINK FOR THE ENGLISHMAN" . . „ 90

"ON THEY TRAMPED, SORE AND WEARY". . . „ 120

"ON LOOKING UP I DISCOVERED A TALL, FANATICAL-LOOKING DERVISH STANDING OVER ME" . . „ 166

"THE GUNS, RUN OUT ALL A-PORT, BLAZED AWAY" „ 184

THE TRENCHES AT TEL-EL-KEBIR . . . . . „ 204

PICTURES OF MANY WARS.

I.

I MEET ARCHIBALD FORBES AND SEE MY FIRST BATTLE.

The Father of the Man—My Training as an Artist—An Epoch-making Event—Marching Orders—Archibald Forbes—My Baptism of Fire.

WHEN I was a boy of about ten years of age my attention was attracted, on my road to school, by pictures in the shop windows—certainly not those of the highest order of art, but nevertheless attractive coloured plates sold by the side of almond-rock, caramels, and other small articles of commerce. The plates were used for toy theatres—much cherished in those days by the youth of Great Britain—and illustrated the plays of "The Miller and his Men," "Three-fingered Jack," and "The Red Rover." To the author of these works of art do I, probably, owe my first artistic inspirations. Many hours have I spent in colouring his Italian skies with deep cobalt blue—at a penny per cake; in putting brilliant scarlet on the jacket of the Red Rover, or tinsel jewels on Grindoff, the miller.

Time wore on, but my taste for art did not wear out. Eventually, stricken with that infantile malady the measles, I developed a more ambitious phase in

my artistic career for, during my convalescence, I would draw regiments of soldiers on my school slate with fixed bayonets, in acute profile. The physician who attended me, on seeing these productions, inspired me further by prophesying a military career. This boyish picture-making developed into a serious craze, and at the age of seventeen I resolved to go in for it in earnest. I let my hair grow long, cultivated a moustache, and worked early and late from the antique. At last my industry was rewarded by my being admitted as a student in the schools of the Royal Academy. These days of lay-figures and the "antique" were those of short commons, for whatever money my father allowed me was mostly spent in models, fees for night-classes, canvas, and colours. Sometimes I went so far as to reduce to vanishing point my rations at luncheon, so determined was I not to sacrifice my mental for my physical requirements. The result was that through overwork and long fasting I at last became almost a chronic dyspeptic. One afternoon, while looking up material in the British Museum, I was attacked with so bad a fit of dyspeptic melancholia that I resolved to try to walk it off.

Making my way towards Holborn, I noticed a crowd round a poster of an evening paper. Elbowing my way through the little mob, I discovered that the cause of all this sensation was a notice in large type that Prince Milan, of Servia, had declared war against Turkey.

That little Christian kingdom had resolved to act as champion for their oppressed neighbours suffering under the Turkish yoke, and had declared war against the great Moslem power. There was much excitement

throughout Europe over this little storm-cloud in the East, for it portended a hurricane that might do considerable damage to more than one continental Power.

"Ah!" thought I. "Here's an opportunity for me to lose my own feelings for a time in the noise and excitement of battle."

I hurried back to the Museum and wrote to the editor of the weekly *Graphic* offering my services for the coming campaign. After that letter was posted, the delightful state of suspense I was in I shall always remember. I passed a restless night, and early the next morning I received a telegram from Mr. William Thomas, the manager, asking me to call upon him. As I entered his room he at once came to business.

"Can you speak French or German?" he asked.

"I can get along fairly well with French."

"That will do. When can you go?"

"At once."

"Then please start by this evening's mail."

A short interview. But a very sweet one to me.

I left my dear mother in tears at Charing Cross station, and with a bag of sovereigns in my pocket and a letter from my editor to Mr. Archibald Forbes, within eighteen hours of my resolve I was off to the wars, and fancied myself the happiest and luckiest of mortals.

As I landed in the Servian capital the sounds of war reverberated through its old streets. The ringing noise of the smith's hammer, the rolling of gun-limbers over rough stones, the whirr of the grindstone as knives and yatagans were sharpened and pointed, the tramp, tramp, of the troops, were heard on all sides. My

first thought was to find Archibald Forbes, who was already *en route* to the front; for I felt that if I met that splendid war-correspondent he would tell me how to set about becoming a war-artist at once—and was he not the hero I had worshipped since a boy—to me the central figure of Sedan, Gravelott, and Le Bourget? I had provided myself with riding-boots, spurs, and a moderate-sized bull-dog revolver, to stamp myself in his eyes as a determined young fellow at once, and set forth by the stage-waggon to the head-quarters of the Serb army at Paratchin.

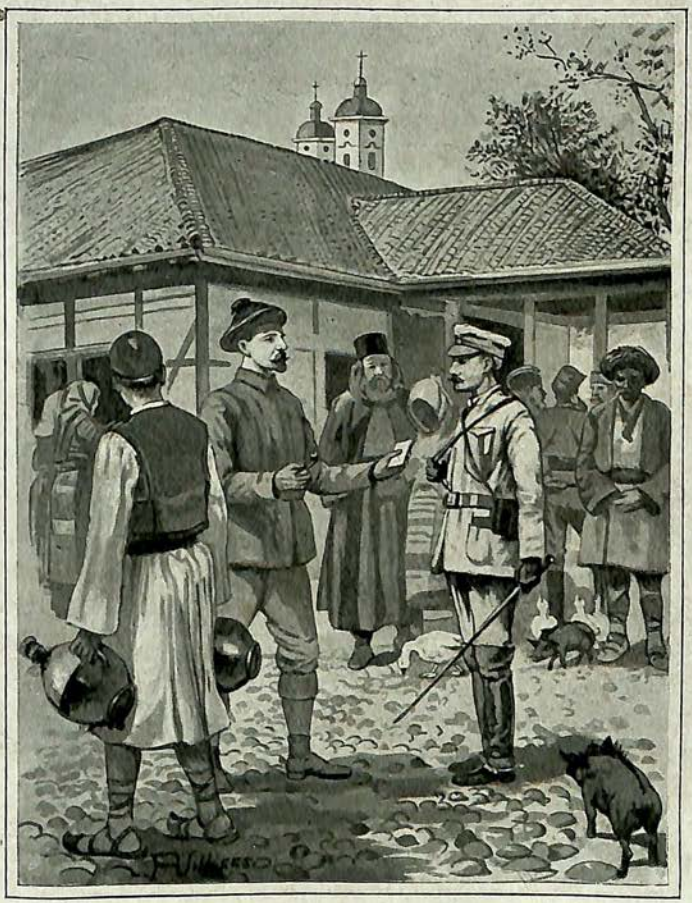
It was market day when the rickety old diligence rumbled over the cobbles of the town, and the streets were thronged with picturesque peasantry in their white linen tunics, girdled with a red sash, with scarlet fez or fur bonnets for their head-gear. Not a few truculently carried knives and silver-mounted pistols in their belts. Pigs were squealing, cattle bellowing, donkeys braying, geese cackling, and besides the clamour of the people haggling over their goods was heard the jingle and clatter of orderlies hurrying hither and thither.

But the most remarkable figure in the whole of this busy scene, sauntering quietly along, elbowing his way through the motley crowd, was a tall, well-knit man in knickers and jacket of homespun, with tam-o'-shanter bonnet cocked over his handsome, sunburned face, a short cherry-wood pipe below his tawny moustache.

"By Jove! this must be the very man I want to meet," I thought as I hurried up to him.

"Mr. Forbes, I believe?"

I was right, and at once handed him my letter of



"MR. FORBES, I BELIEVE?"

introduction. He quickly scanned the contents, and with a genial smile said:

"You must be tired and hungry after your long journey. Come with me to my hotel; I think I can get you a substitute for a beefsteak and a bottle of beer."

If we were not fast friends on sight, the schnitzel and laager clinched it. Over that simple repast in the Paratchin hostelry we struck up a friendship which was in a short period to be cemented by the hardships and danger shared together on many a battlefield—a friendship which has been, perhaps, one of the greatest satisfactions of my vagrant life.

That evening some fugitive Bulgarians sought safety within the Servian lines and arrived in town. The pitiable story of their sufferings was wired to England by Forbes, and I sketched the curiously-clad groups of women and children. Forbes in his message good-naturedly stated that I had arrived, and that the pencil was assisting the pen, and soon the public would have pictures to illustrate what he had written.

When the necessary permits to join the forces on the field were granted us, I found that I must receive my baptism of fire with the army of the Ebar, and Forbes was appointed to that of the river Timok. It was a sad separation to me, for I had nursed the hope that it was possible that we might campaign together. We parted one afternoon on a white dusty road running south and east. Forbes was for the east, and I turned my horse southward. We embraced on parting, for we might never meet again; but we vowed, however, that if the fortunes of war brought us near one another we would campaign together in future.

I travelled for three days in a springless country cart, through a sunny land with ripening Indian corn, studded with picturesque villages. The porticos of the cottages revelled in bright colours of pepper-pods strung to the eaves. The men, with brilliant scarlet fez and waist-belt, lazily worked in the fields, while their womenkind sat spinning on the verandahs of the cottages, dressed in the pretty national costume of white gowns embroidered at the breast, with aprons of gorgeous hues. Their children, sunburnt little urchins almost nude, played about the compound, and Serb porkers grunted lazily about the highways and byways. But there was the shadow to all this sunshine. There was a stern look on the faces of the men as they occasionally halted in their work and gazed across the plains. For, far away over the smiling fields, a trailing cloud of lurid dust hung over the main road southward from early dawn to nightfall, which marked the highway leading to death.

The first shots had been exchanged on the frontier and bloody war had begun. As I journeyed night and day that cloud of dust steadily rolled on, beaten up by the legions tramping on to the front. One afternoon the tide of this living, unceasing stream changed for a time, for from out the yellow cloud a line of "arabas," creaking with their springless gear, crawled towards me along the sun-baked road—some seventy waggons, yoked with black buffalo, plodding under their burdens of whimpering, groaning wounded. Beneath rough awnings of grass matting, on litters of straw, men lay writhing in agony or tossing in the throes of fever, the first-fruits of the campaign. On arriving at Ivanitza a gloriously picturesque old town with the river Ebar

winding by its quaint streets, I left my waggon at an inn and hired a horse to take me up Mount Yavor, which loomed a purple height 4,000 feet above the town and on the summit of which was the Servian camp. I arrived at sunset, after toiling up the mount all day and that night I slept in my boots to be ready for the dawn, when the Servians were about to invade Turkish territory by marching on the Moslem town of Sinitza. I rolled myself up in my blanket and tried to sleep. I lay on the edge of a precipitous slope trending towards the Turkish position. It was a quiet night, and the fragrance of the pine trees around me made me heavy with sleep, but for hours I could not slumber. To-morrow I should see my first battle. What would it be like? Should I ever return to my dear mother? These thoughts kept me awake. The moon flooded the mountains and valleys, and out of the sombre foliage clothing the slopes, bright shafts of light lit up the bayonets of the ever-vigilant sentries as they patrolled the depths of the forest. Tired out with watching the twinkle of the bayonets, I fell asleep.

I awoke with someone shaking my shoulder and, in very good English, saying:

"Here's something hot. We shall soon be at work, and it's bad to start on an empty—what you call, stomacher." And a good-natured officer gave me a steaming mug of coffee.

I sat up and rubbed my eyes. The whole scene had suddenly changed. The slopes of the mountain were alive with busy men rolling up their overcoats, adjusting their accoutrements, and, with rifle in hand, some were already trailing through the brushwood

towards the forest road crossing the summit of the mountain.

On a sudden the blood rushed to my head, and every nerve seemed to tingle in my body, as "Crack! Crack! Crack!" came the sound of rifles through the keen morning air. I was in for it at last. I hurried to where my horse had been tethered, but he had gone. There was no time to hunt for him, for the battle had commenced. The crackle of the rifles was now incessant, so I ran towards the moving infantry, and, catching up with them, marched by the side of the battalions for about an hour, when the men lay down. On our immediate right some earth had been freshly turned over, and sticking out from the trench were cannon. Presently, some men, lying *perdu*, sprang to their feet and served the guns. I was about to sketch the quick action when they suddenly opened fire, startling and deafening me with their simultaneous crash. As far as I could make out, they aimed at nothing in particular, for the morning was dull and the smoke was long in lifting. Soon the air was filled with a curious rushing sound, like that of a low-toned fog-horn, followed by a terrible explosion and a flash of fire. Then the top of a pine-tree on our left flew in splinters. The noise from that mutilated pine was as if a huge tuning-fork had been struck, the vibration making the ground on which we stood tremble.

The Turks were returning the fire of our battery, and this was their first attempt to get the range. For some time the pines were the only sufferers in this way, therefore I was surprised to see our gunners suddenly limber up and begin to retire. This was done slowly at first, then the horses broke into a trot and, at last,

under the lashes of their drivers, they galloped furiously towards the road up which we had advanced. I was watching with astonishment this rather—as I thought—premature movement, when my reverie was broken by a sudden rush of infantry coming through the fog of cannon-smoke which still clung to the earth.

As these men crowded together on entering the forest road, one of the enemy's shells, instead of striking the pines, burst right in the midst of the retreating crowd. Then, for the first time, my eyes were opened to the stern realities of war. Before the report of that exploded shell had passed away at least half a dozen poor fellows lay writhing, almost torn to fragments with its splintered segments, drenching the turf with blood. At this sight a faintness crept over me, and for a moment paralysis seemed to hold my limbs. But only for a moment, for now the air was charged with a noise like that of the buzzing of mosquitos or the lash of a fine whip. "Whit! Whit! Ping!" And then, straight in front of me a few feet from the ground, little puffs of smoke floated upwards like soap bubbles. Behind these puffs of smoke, waving through the scrub like poppies in a corn-field, flashed the red fez of the Turk. There was nothing between me and the enemy but a few boulders and about a hundred yards of space.

"By Jove!" I thought. "It's high time to go." And directly that idea flashed through me the rapid manner I put into execution that old adage, "Discretion is the better part of valour," was wonderful.

The Servian army had been outflanked and was in full retreat, and for a time it seemed to me to be an utter rout. The way was crowded with infantry waggons, ambulances, cavalry, and artillery, all hurrying

downward like an angry torrent, arrested for a moment here, then surging up, breaking its way, cutting fresh courses, spreading itself down the precipitous sides to the base of the mountain, out on to the plains below.

When night set in a thunder-storm burst upon us, and as the Turks occupied the summit of the overhanging mountain, we could not distinguish the flash of their guns from the electric glare of the lightning-rift clouds. It rained in torrents. Several hundred head of cattle that had been let loose from our camp above were madly racing down the path, tossing and goring everything that came in their way, trampling in the slush and mire many of the limping wounded and cowardly stragglers. As the retreat hurried on at certain points of the road shells were bursting from the Turkish cannon above us, blocking the route with the *débris* of wrecked carts and mutilated humanity. For the first experience of war this was indeed passing through the double ordeal of fire and water. So when I rejoined Forbes a week later in the beleaguered city of Alexinatz, I felt that I already knew something of campaigning.

II.

A RED CROSS INCIDENT.

"The Hoof of the Turkish Horse"—Among the Wounded—An Uncouth Colleague—What I Said of Him—Red Cross Heroines—Dr. MacKellar's Quarters—A Death that Came Home to Me.

It was a warm time in the Morava valley, not only climatically, for the summer was exceptionally hot and oppressive, but it was heated with the atmosphere of battle-burning villages and blazing camp-fires. And after sunset during the last week in August, a dull red light flowed over the valley, which, mixing with the rays of the yellow moon, coloured the limpid waters of the Morava with blood-red tints.

As I sat on the ramparts above the town of Alexinatz, smoking my pipe after the evening meal, a low crackling and hissing would come sighing with the evening breeze from the smouldering homesteads of the unfortunate Servian peasantry, and here and there specks of bright flame would suddenly shoot up marking the nearer approach of the enemy. Each day's bloody work added to the night's lurid glow, for the Turks were always victorious, and destroyed everything that came in their way as they advanced, illustrating the aphorism: "Where the hoof of the Turkish horse treads no blade of grass ever grows."

I had watched the last shots one evening flicker against the purple background of the darkening hills,

spluttering in the gloaming like the flecks of fire from a flint and steel, for the Turks were now within a few miles of our camp, and the morrow portended a warmer period still. Far into the night the stretcher-bearers were trailing over the Alexinatz bridge, and up through the winding streets with their suffering burdens of humanity. Archibald Forbes and I would spend our evenings during this anxious time by starting from the school-house of Alexinatz (which was used as a temporary hospital by the English surgeons under their brave and clever chief, Dr. MacKellar), to give help to the patient sufferers lying on their litters as they waited their turn outside the lazarette.

To-night there was an unbroken line of bearers, stretching down the main street out of the town into the open country. Many of the badly wounded had waited since early morn for surgical treatment. Some, growing impatient, had struggled out of their stretchers or the crowded waggons and had crawled along the side-walks towards the school-house, till their life-blood drained from their veins into the gutters. There they lay, some stiff and stark staring up into the face of the mellow moon. As we slowly walked down the sad procession we would turn aside those already dead to make room for the living to gain the hospital. Forbes and I toiled unremittingly backwards and forwards on this painful duty till the fires in the valley paled before the stronger light of dawn.

The three or four rooms which constituted the hospital were crowded. There was hardly space for the doctors to work in and this they had to do by the fitful flicker of a few tallow candles, fixed in congealed pools of grease on the floor. I had been assisting the

surgeons by passing the instruments from one room to another, holding a candle, or pressing the hand of some poor creature under operation, when, almost faint from the heavy atmosphere, I left the room for fresh air. Picking my way through the crowd of wounded on the landing and stairway, I had gained the street entrance, when my leg was plucked at by a poor creature in the shadow of the portal. As he lifted his head, a moonbeam fell upon a sight I shall never forget. His face, a mere pulp, was crushed by a fragment of shell, and was as black as a negro's with clotted gore. Staring appalled at this gruesome sight, he roused me by touching my boot, and, slowly lifting his arm, pointed to the lower portion of his face. He repeated this action twice before I understood him; then I knelt by his side and poured some brandy from my flask down his throat. He could not express his thanks by word of mouth, but his eyelids trembled, and he lifted his arm again, bringing his hand gradually to the salute. The quiet patience of the soldier in this fearful plight will ever remain in my memory.

During the night a contingent of Russian volunteers arrived with a few officers. Then, when the sun was up, Servian reinforcements came in from Deligrad.

To blare of bugles, with swinging stride, the troops came tramping down the street, when some of the few remaining wounded of the previous night, still lying in the road-way, aroused themselves for a moment and tried to turn their groans into cheers. Regiment after regiment passed on. Far into the morn the points of the bayonets glittered above the dust-cloud as the soldiers marched through the town out into the open

and the valley—the valley of the shadow of death indeed, for the smell of powder and blood was everywhere. The desultory shots that had been exchanged in the early morning gradually ceased, and for a time a universal quietude reigned, but just before midday the opening of the artillery fire on both sides, and the sharp crackle of musketry presaged close fighting.

I am easily stirred by some dramatic action in a good play and the martial strains of a fine band, but the ping of the bullet and the whistle of the shell that day certainly stirred me more.

"Plenty of time," said my friend Forbes, noticing my perturbed spirits. "They are just playing up to the grand finale, and that's when we ought to be there. Come; sit down and eat your dinner."

We took our accustomed seats at the little table in the corner of our hostelry, facing the street. As we were beginning our meal a smiling young Russian, with Calmuck-like cheek bones, sandy hair, small grey eyes, and tip-tilted nose, with a pair of blue spectacles perched upon it, looked through the window. On seeing us he opened the door, walked in, bowed, and marched up to our table. He smiled and wiped his pince-nez on the sleeve of his jacket, placed them on the table by his plate, then called for food and commenced eating.

Now, being an old campaigner, I can put up with almost any kind of eccentricity in the manner of eating, but this little Russian's behaviour was, to say the least of it, nauseating. Not in the fact that he used his fingers or worked his knife with marvellous dexterity in conveying food to his mouth. When the feeding

was done he calmly seized his fork, which had been untouched for any other service, and slowly began dislodging from between his teeth the stringy portions of the tough beef-steak he had been consuming. At one moment he seemed to be performing an act of jugglery as the three-pronged instrument almost disappeared down his throat in search of some molar, but it would miraculously turn up once more, and he would smile as much as to say: "You see, ladies and gentlemen, there is no deception about it."

My sense of decency was so aroused at this exhibition that I turned to Forbes and said:

"That young man will not be a great loss to society if he gets shot this afternoon."

After the Russian had made his mouth comfortable and lodged his goggles on his little sunburnt nose, his face widened into a broad grin as he told us that he knew us by repute, that he had only arrived that morning, that he was a brother war-correspondent for a Moscow journal, and that he felt highly honoured in making the acquaintance of two such distinguished brethren. In spite of his urbanity and good-humour, the uncomfortable sensations he had caused us by his novel use of the fork could not easily be effaced. We were glad to light our pipes and get once more into the street. The increasing rattle of musketry and booming of guns all through dinner told us that the fight was waxing hotter and hotter. We hastened to the Tête-du-pont. The works at the bridge were bristling with bayonets, for the reserves that had arrived in the morning were packed closely in cover. About half a mile from the bridge we joined MacKellar and his surgeons, and jogged along in their ambulance till we came to a

favourable spot beside a deserted cottage, where we halted to receive the wounded.

In our immediate front were fields of Indian corn, then a wood stretched from the river on our left flank as far as the hills, skirting the right of valley. Through this wood, close into the foot hills where it passed a village, our road could be traced by occasional puffs of smoke and dust as a shell struck it, or as a mounted orderly scampered along. The fighting was fierce on the other side of the thicket. We could see the branches of the trees stand out in bold relief from the yellow flashes of our artillery on the outer fringe. The little village on our right seemed almost deserted, but lazily hanging in the noon-tide heat was a red cross flag on the roof of one of the houses. A surgeon, whom I joined, was told off to go as far as this hamlet and report the number of wounded. As we began to move parallel to the wood a horseman passed us, waving his arms in recognition and grinning from ear to ear. His horse, a rugged, heavy-boned animal, seemed to be playing cup and ball with him, but the rider still held on. It was the Moscow correspondent of the fork incident.

One or two shells from the enemy, missing our artillery, passed over the trees and fell upon the road. One whistled so near to us that we fell flat upon the ground. It whisked along into the field on our right and burst in the soft soil. As the mud and the stones were scattered around, more and more did our little Russian's horse play cup and ball with his rider, till we lost sight of horse and man as they galloped into the village.

On entering the hamlet we found it rapidly filling

with wounded, many of whom had maimed themselves by blowing off their trigger-fingers. These stumps were freshly blackened with powder, and we could see by the looks of these cowardly creatures and the sombre faces of the seriously hurt that the day was lost.

We made our way to the ambulance house. The wounded were being hurried out of the place into the country carts, which were sent away as soon as filled. To our surprise we found the Red Cross Service worked devotedly by three Russian women, dressed in neat uniforms, with their badge of office painted on their black mackintosh aprons.

Up to their arm-pits in blood, those plucky little ladies had been carrying on the duty of the hospital all day, and they were now standing at their post seeing to the safe departure of the wounded. The noise increased in the main street. Now a gun thundered along, then another, followed by a few infantry fugitives. A shell skimmed over the roof of the hospital, loosening a few tiles, but leaving the Red Cross flag still flying. The Servians had already commenced the retreat. How soon the Turks might be in the town Heaven only knew. I turned to the sisters, lifted my hat, and said:

"Ladies, the enemy is out-flanking our position, and will probably be in the town in less than half an hour. Let us see you on the road to safety, and leave this business to us," pointing to the few maimed creatures still awaiting transport.

One lady, with top-boots of Russian cut, short skirt, cossack jacket, and pistol slung across her shoulders, touched her little black silk Montenegrin cap, fixed on

her mop of frizzly auburn hair, and, after a mock salute, said sternly:

"Sir, who are you?"

Rather abashed, I was stammering out a reply. Not heeding me, she continued:

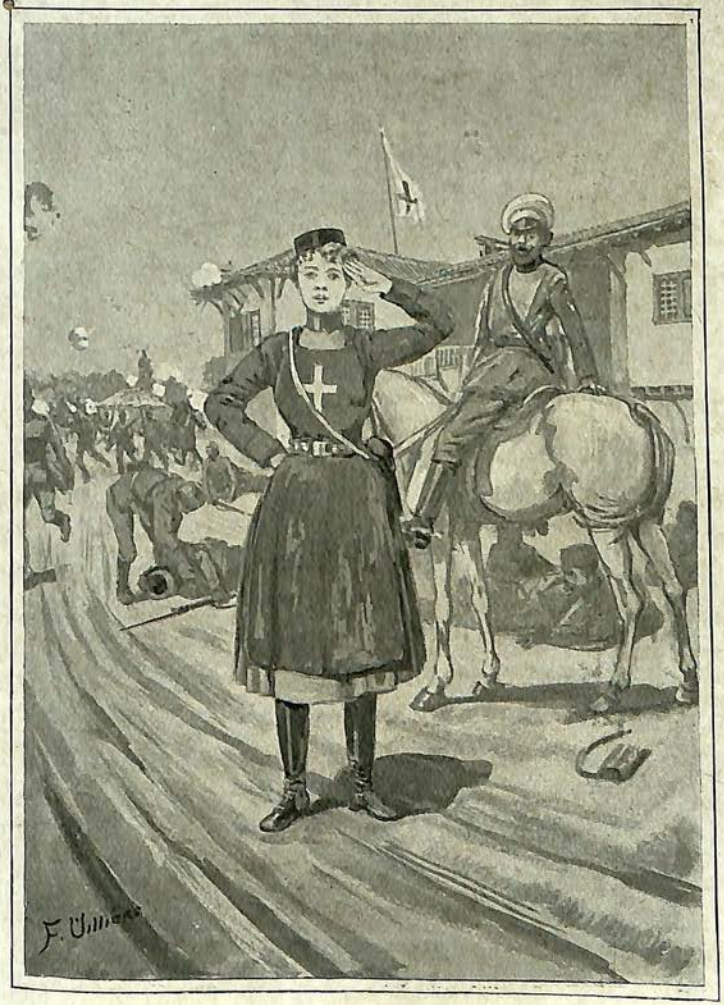
"You are a civilian. I can see this is no place for you."

"I am a war-correspondent," I stuttered.

"Then, as a non-combatant, seek a place of safety and leave us alone."

Our Moscow friend of the fork incident had ridden up, and hearing the remark of his country-woman, his miserable stereotyped grin suffused his face. In my inmost heart I was sorry that his horse had not missed him at cup and ball. The Russian Red Cross ladies stuck heroically to their post. Out of pique we felt obliged to stay and see them off the ground, which was now being swept by the Turkish sharpshooters, clearing their way in front. As we left one end of the village with our contingent of wounded, the Turks entered the other. Luckily for us the Serbs made a bold stand for at least an hour, allowing us to come up with the current of the retreat. We were whirled along in thick clouds of dust in which, struggling and jumbling, rolled artillery, ambulances, and peasants' carts, crowded with women and children and their goods and chattels. For a time a serious block occurred. The wheel of a waggon left its axle, down crashed the cart, shooting its contents of household goods into the road.

The pots and pans, rolling between the legs of some artillery horses, frightened the poor brutes on to their haunches, and they, backing the gun into a team of



" SIR, WHO ARE YOU?'"

oxen, set these animals kicking out right and left, scattering the limping wounded and the cowardly stragglers. With shrieks, groans, and curses, the seething masses wavered for a time, then straggled on, all making for the protection of the reserves at the Tête-du-pont.

On reaching MacKellar's quarters once more I found that Forbes, with great forethought, had at the commencement of the retreat turned the doctor's ambulance waggon and the horses towards Alexinatz, and was now strongly urging one of the surgeons, young Hare, to hurry up into the vehicle. This surgeon was called "the timid Hare," not for want of pluck—far from that!—but on account of his modest, retiring temperament. Hare was tying an artery of a wounded soldier, who was still bleeding badly, and would not leave his charge.

"For goodness sake, come along!" cried Forbes. "The Turks are now at our side of the wood. Look. Their bullets are drilling holes through the mud walls of the hut."

But still "timid Hare" hung on to the man's artery. We rushed at the surgeon just as the last turn of the bull-dog torniquet did its work, and Hare and his patient were at length bundled into the waggon. In another moment we were being whirled on with the rest of the column.

As I looked back along the road the Red Cross flag in the village we had just quitted was still flying, but over the heads of the followers of the False Prophet. Flames leapt up in several places, and a column of black smoke rolled towards the sky. Only a few shells burst on our line of retreat, for the Turkish guns were

soon silenced by our heavier artillery at the head of the bridge.

The Moslems did not harass the Servians further, for night was falling. Unmolested, our jaded column passed over the bridge, up into the town, to repeat the horrors of the previous night.

Entering the school-house to see how the wounded were getting on, I discovered a body laid out for burial. The figure seemed, somehow, quite familiar to me. Walking up to the table, I stood dumbfoundered. There was the little nose, almost black against the livid face. With a quiet smile on his lips lay our Russian friend, the correspondent, he of the fork incident.

A handkerchief tied round his throat hid the wound which had caused his death. A stray shot had passed through his neck. A great sadness fell upon me, for he was one of us, after all. I could picture his mother, or some other dear one, waiting anxiously for his return, far away in the heart of Russia.

While I was still in the room two soldiers placed the body on a stretcher, and a sister of mercy arranged a few flowers round the little cross on his breast as he was carried out into the street. As he was a civilian, the officials of the Orthodox Church were notified of his death.

In rich vestments four priests and a choir of boys headed the funeral procession, which I followed as it moved off to the little cemetery overlooking the town. It was almost dark before the service was over.

When I returned Forbes had sent off his day's budget of news, and was waiting for me to sit down with him to his evening meal at the inn. I told him of the

fate of the little correspondent and my sad journey. Looking steadily at me, he said:

"Do you remember your observation about our Russian colleague at this very table this morning?"

The recollection came back to me with painful vividness.

"Yes!" I sighed. "I remember—I remember."

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

III.

SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

I Go Over to the Turks—Frank Power—A Turkish Citadel—"Ze Cleverest Dragoman in all ze Turkey"—What He did for us—Constantinople—Colonel Valentine Baker—My Sea-Captain and his *Firman*—What it was to be an Englishman in Turkey—Barrington Kennett and His Servian Servant—Hafuz Pasha—Face to Face with Mine Enemy—A Policy of Bluff and Guile—It is Crowned with Success.

AN armistice had been proclaimed between the Servians and the Turks in the early winter of '76. Fighting was over for a time, so I made my way back from the Servian front to Belgrade and wired to my paper for instructions. The reply was:—

"Prepare to start for India for the Proclamation of the Queen-Empress."

I immediately left the Servian capital for Vienna. Having kicked my heels for about five days in that gay city, I received notice from my journal that the Indian function had been provided for, and that I was to join the Turks. From an editorial chair this instruction meant but little, but to me it meant much. Having shared the vicissitudes of the Servian army for some eight months, suddenly to go over to the Turks was a change fraught with no little danger. But such a *bouleversement* was simply part and parcel of a war-correspondent's duty, and so I started once more for the East.

I was to wipe the slate clean and start on my new

venture as a gentleman just out from England, and anxious to see some of that wonderful material which is the support of the great Ottoman Empire, the sturdy Turkish fighting-man.

On board the Danubian steamer I chummed in with a bright, smart young Irishman, fresh from Trinity College, Dublin. He was on a journey of adventure, bent on joining either the Serbs or the Turks, and had tossed up to decide the matter. Heads had won, and so had the Turks.

At Kalafat, on the Roumanian side of the river, my Irish friend requisitioned a small fishing-boat and rowed himself across to Viddin, there to join Osman Pasha and his gallant Turks. The young Irishman was poor Frank Power, who was eventually killed in trying to escape from Khartoum when acting as correspondent for the *Times*.

At Rustchuk I landed with an acquaintance I had made on board, and I remained two or three days in that town with the object of seeing the fortifications. An Armenian dragoman, whom we had engaged, told us that there would be no difficulty in obtaining permission, and that he would make all arrangements with the officials.

One morning we drove up to the citadel. To our surprise the guard turned out, and we were saluted on driving into the fortress. Here the colonel in command, with his staff, showed so much enthusiasm on meeting us that we were almost paralysed with astonishment. While his troops were mustering for a review he told us he would take us round the fortress. We went through every hole and corner of that remarkable stronghold, then we were regaled with coffee and cigarettes to

prepare us for the grand finale of this reception, which was a review in the parade-ground of all the available troops, and we were the saluting point.

At parting, the colonel expressed his thanks for the honour we had done him and his officers, and trusted we should go home with a good impression of the Turkish soldier.

When we arrived at our hotel we noticed the excessive politeness of the landlord and his servants, and whenever a soldier met us we were always saluted.

"Well," I thought to myself, "this is rather extraordinary, and at the same time rather unfortunate," as I by no means had any desire to be recognised; indeed, I felt like a guilty person, for I was always apprehensive lest my sojourn with the Servians would somehow leak out, when arrest, or something worse, might be my fate.

I called up the dragoman and said to him:

"What on earth do these people mean by their extraordinary civility and our splendid reception up at the citadel?"

With a cunning smile on his face and rapping his nose, he said:

"I am a very good dragoman."

I nodded assent.

He continued: "I am ze best dragoman in all ze Turkey."

I said—"All right. But go on, you fool. What do you mean?"

"You say you want to see ze fortress. Only most important personage can gain admittance, for it is ze war zat is on. So I say to myself, 'These gentlemen must be important gentlemen; they must be ze

colonels of ze British army, and also ze M.P.'s too.' So I went to ze citadel and I told ze commandant."

"But," I exclaimed, "you ruffian! It is all very clever, but look at the hole you've placed us in. They will wire to the Embassy in Constantinople, and we shall probably be imprisoned or more likely shot on the spot."

Still with his cunning smile on his face, and shaking his head, and tapping his nose again with his finger—

"Oh, no, you won't, sir. Oh, no. It is all right. I am ze cleverest dragoman in all ze Turkey. I am no fool. I tell zem dat your visit was very secret; you were travelling what you call *incognito* on ze secret service of your country."

Well, we had had a good time, and we felt bound to forgive the lying propensity of the clever dragoman; but he and the situation were too dangerous for us, so we took the evening train for Varna, and next day steamed down the Bosphorus and landed in the foul and gloriously picturesque city of the Sultans. Here my difficulties in getting to the Turkish front were to begin. Luckily, in those days names of artists were seldom published below their sketches, so I was known but little, even to the English fraternity. That was one point in my favour. At the club in Galata I met several interesting personages. One gentleman, who sat opposite to me nearly every dinner-hour, was a man who was to soon distinguish himself as the saviour of the remnant of the Turkish army that was driven back on to Constantinople two years later.

This gentleman was under a cloud for the moment—depressed and gloomy. He would talk to me of the impossibility of dealing with the Turkish officials and

of the difficulty in organising their *gendarmerie*—a service which was his special mission, for my friend of the dinner-table was Colonel Baker, formerly of the 10th Hussars. But another person whom I met in that club, probably more interesting to me for the moment, was a gentleman who was visiting the interior of Turkey for the purpose of writing a book—a strange undertaking at this particular moment, for the country was up in arms. The Bulgarian atrocities were still rampant, and things generally were anything but pleasant. However, this was just the man I wanted to meet, for he had a *firman*, a Turkish pass par-tout. It was at least half a yard in length, and the Sultan's signature to it was as big as one's hand. Now a long *firman* goes a long way with the Turkish official, for, according to the size of the document, so, in those days, were hospitality and politeness meted out to the possessor of the precious scroll.

The owner of this particular *firman* was a jovial, chubby sea-captain, with a face like the sun, always ruddy and cheerful. His vigorous, curly hair had a tinge of grey in it, for he had commanded a vessel in the Black Sea during the Crimean War, and had supplied the British and Turkish troops with salt beef and potatoes, carrying wounded back as ballast to the base of operations. The Turks remembered that man with gratitude for his services in the old days, and from the Sublime Porte he had received this half-yard of paper on the strength of those memories.

This was the man for me. I could not apply for a pass on my own account, considering my connection with the Servians, so I persuaded the jovial sea-captain to include me in the *firman*, which he did as travelling

assistant artist to the owner of the document, my name, luckily, not being mentioned at all.

What a time we had in those days! You had simply to be an Englishman, and you were received with open arms by the Turkish official or peasant. At Adrianople an aide-de-camp from the Governor met us. We were billeted on the first merchant of the town, who, with usual Oriental politeness, would come in after our evening meal, inquire after our healths, and, with a salaam, assure us that his servants, his horses, and his house were no longer his, but ours. Poor fellow, to accommodate us he was obliged to take up quarters in his *hareem* on the opposite side of the road.

The Governor was good enough to place his stables at our disposal, but as they contained full-blooded Arab stallions, I visited the sights of Adrianople on foot. My companion, being a sailor, took kindly to the horses, but the animals did not take kindly to him. When we eventually left Adrianople, my friend was almost a cripple owing to the erratic temper of the Governor's chargers.

The misery of Roumelia soon became apparent. Whole villages had been wiped out, nothing having been left standing but the brick stays of chimneys—smoke-begrimed monuments of Turkish oppression and cruelty. Dead bodies, scantily buried, lay in the furrowed fields by the roadside, their feet and hands, and sometimes their heads, sticking out of the foul mud. Bashi-bazouks, with their motley costumes; or Circassians in their quaint, astrakan headgear, and long, sober-coloured coats, with their breasts studded with silver cartridges, passed us on the road. Behind

came their baggage ponies, loaded with plunder from the Bulgarian and Servian villages. They never molested us, as we were escorted by a Saptieh almost as villainously picturesque as those cut-throats themselves, and we were also known to be Englishmen. For the fiat had gone forth from Constantinople throughout the land that the English were to be respected.

Right up to the old town of Nisch wrecked villages lined the gruesome way. How glad was I, for a time, to get out of all this misery, and to settle down for a few days in that old frontier town of Turkey.

The English doctors serving with the Turkish Army gave us a good reception, and I found a corner on an ottoman where I could rest my weary head in a room along with six surgeons. Those gallant, plucky volunteers had been striving to relieve the sufferings of the wretched wounded for the last eight months. Living on short commons and more or less pigging it purely for humanity's sake—good fellows all.

One night at our meagre little meal in our drawing-room, dining-room, and bedroom in one, Barrington Kennett (now Sir Vincent Kennett-Barrington) came across the Servian lines into the Turkish camp. He was, by permission of the Turks, to pass through to Constantinople for the purpose of procuring comforts and medical stores for the Servian wounded during the armistice. He was astonished to see me at that dinner-table, for I had travelled with him for many weeks during the recent fighting in Servia.

"It's all very fine, Villiers," he said, "but you'd better take care. Oh, by-the-bye, you say you are going to join the Turks who now occupy Alexinatz. You are a good fellow, and I know you'll do me a

service. I have a Servian servant who promised to go with me as far as Constantinople, but he's in such a deuce of a funk in case the Turks may do him some mischief that he won't go any further, and at the same time he is afraid to go back unless his safety is guaranteed. I pity the man, for he volunteered with a good heart, but it has now failed him. I must be off after breakfast to-morrow, and I can't look after him. Will you befriend him for my sake?"

"Right you are, Kennett; I'll see him across the frontier into the Servian lines. Have no fear."

It was a rash promise, though I did not think so at the time. I saw the Servian; he was overcome with gratitude, and that made me all the firmer in my resolve to see him safely into the hands of his countrymen.

At breakfast next morning Kennett, who was very jovial, told us some of his experiences in coming thro' the hostile lines, and then, suddenly looking up at me, he said:

"Oh, by Jove, Villiers! I forgot to tell you that the Turks don't at all love you at Alexinatz. Hafuz Pasha, the Governor, has threatened to hang the correspondent of the *Graphic* on sight on account of the impression he had caused in England by sending a sketch depicting the cruelty of the Turks towards Servian prisoners; so just you look after yourself."

This news astonished me at the time, coming from Kennett; and I was irritated that he did not inform me of this uncharitable feeling on the part of the Governor of Alexinatz before I gave him the promise to take his servant across the lines. But I did not like to remonstrate with him, lest he might think that I

was shirking my responsibility. Kennett left us, and the next morning I resolved to start on my journey.

The greater part of the next day, on my part, was devoted to persuading my sea-captain friend to journey with me to Alexinatz. I thought it only fair to tell him of the risk I was running; and I must say that the sturdy old seaman, in spite of squalls ahead and probably very dirty weather, tacked round to my view of the situation, and lent me the kindly cover of his talismanic *firman*.

At eight the next morning we faced the dreary plain between Nisch and Alexinatz. The air was crisp with frost, and the little puddles in the rough road we were traversing cracked with their thin covering of ice as our horses cantered over them.

Towards evening we sighted the quaint tower of the orthodox church of Alexinatz and the familiar trenches and redoubts which girded the city, and from behind which, only a few weeks earlier, I had watched the bloody advance of the Turks up the Morava Valley. My heart was beating fast as I crossed the little wooden bridge into the town. Our horses were covered with hoar-frost, for the last ruddy flash of sunlight had left us when still a mile short of the town. The puddles had filmed over with ice, and our horses went floundering and spluttering in the deep ruts of the abominable road, and were now limping with bleeding hoofs up the main street towards the Government House. Every house was gutted. Doors and window-frames were gone for firewood, and every scrap of iron, copper, or metal of any kind had been torn away from the crazy structures, so that it seemed to require but a puff of wind to send them tumbling like a pack of cards to the

ground. In the hotel where Forbes and I took our last meal before the fall of Alexinatz, horses were stabled, and in the centre of the gutted building was a roaring fire built up of the doors and rafters. Bashi-bazouks were carousing round the blaze. The news of the arrival of the two strangers soon spread. But though the town was alive with cut-throats and ruffians, the irregular troops of a Turkish army, we were not molested, but, on the contrary, were treated with deference and consideration. Ah! we were Englishmen. In those days a British visitor was an honoured traveller, and, further, the magic of the yard-long *firman* had spread. To the Governor's house we were at once led, our steps being lighted by the glare of the burning panel of a door steeped in oil. There was no need of a guide on my part, for I knew every inch of the way, and every corner of the Governor's house, the cellar included. I wondered if there was still any Negotin left—an excellent brand of wine from the Servian province of that name.

"Three steps here, sir," said our dragoman, as we ascended the steps in front of the *Konak*. I laughed in my sleeve—as if I didn't know! I remembered one moonlight night when Negotin annihilated those steps and—but no matter. "The Governor, His Excellency Hafuz Pasha, will be glad to receive the distinguished visitors," softly said an effeminate-looking Circassian aide-de-camp as we entered the hall.

My heart stood still for a second. Hafuz was the man who had threatened to curtail my existence. "Well," I thought, "I am in for it now." I was hungry, weary, and cold, and I resolved that I would

have some supper first, anyway. I took off my hat, and followed the aide-de-camp into a room whose two windows opened in French fashion on to a balcony facing the street. Ah! didn't I remember that same balcony—the summer nights of August, the little Servian Red Cross sister and the gallant young English surgeon, the shadow of the purple grapes from the vine overhead, the disturbed kiss and the chaff the wicked young dog received from us afterwards. Alas! the unsympathetic Turk had made charcoal of the vine. The balustrade of the balcony was probably being made into slugs wherewith to bring down the brethren of the little Red Cross sister, and not even mats and sacking could keep the bitter grip of the frosty night out from the room now.

On a packing case sat the Turkish commander, bent forward, chafing his hands over a charcoal brasier. On another trunk by his side was a tallow candle stuck in its grease on a slab of wood. A camp table, chair, and stool made up the rest of the furniture. He rose to his feet as we moved towards him, and at once waved to the chair and stool for us to be seated. A little man was Hafuz, with a kindly smile on his face. Blue-eyed and fresh-looking, he was not more than fifty years. A fluffy beard tinged with grey gave him the aspect of a well-to-do merchant rather than that of a man of war.

"You must be both tired and hungry, gentlemen," he said. "I have nothing to give you but chops and tea, and these I have already ordered the cook to prepare for you." The Pasha spoke in French, so I became interpreter for my friend, who knew even less than I of that language. I was in for it now, I felt sure, yet

I had to take the lead in this business. I durst not hesitate, so I commenced at once.

"Pasha," I cried, "if you had anticipated our desires you could not have been kinder. The meal you kindly offer us is English, and we will do justice to your hospitality in good time. My respected employer here," pointing to the sea captain, who nodded and smiled urbanely, "with whom I am associated in this *firman* of his glorious majesty the Sultan—whom may the Prophet preserve" (here I unrolled the document to the Pasha's gaze), "are travellers in search of material for a book on the glories of the great Turkish Empire. On our journey up country we met an Englishman named Kennett."

Here the Pasha, who had been yawning and nodding over the brazier, brightened up, and a keen look came into his eyes.

"Yes, I know the gentleman. He came from the Servians with instructions from the Seraskierat that he should be permitted to pass through the lines."

"Well," I continued, "he had with him a Servian servant. This man is a crazy fool. He got as far as Nisch, and there he began to tremble for his safety. In every shadow someone lurked to do him hurt, till he prayed to be sent back. Then he began to tremble again, for how could he return without safe conduct? Kennett was on the horns of a dilemma in regard to him, and so he begged us to take charge of the fool as we were coming this way. What creatures these Servians must be," I added, "if this fellow is a specimen!" Then I sat down.

"The man shall be sent back to-morrow. Consider

him no longer a burden to you. He is in my charge," replied the Pasha.

"Your Excellence!" I cried. "Oh! you don't know what manner of man this creature is. He would die from sheer fright if he left our side. No; with your permission I will accompany him to the Servian lines."

"It's a long journey," said the Pasha, "and dangerous too. For it is the last day of the armistice, and we can't tell when the first shot may be fired again. Leave the man to me."

"Let me go, Pasha; never mind my safety. I will run the risk. It will also be an opportunity to see something of these Servians. We have read so much about them in England, and we have given our word to Kennett, too. Allow us to keep it."

"Then one shall go. Choose between you. You English are curious people." And the Pasha laughed. "See now, your food is here." So we sat down and devoured our chops and tea, while the hospitable Pasha smiled and smoked.

"What hour to-morrow for departure, Excellence?" I said, as my companion and I rose to depart. "The lot has fallen to me for to-morrow's journey."

"At eight o'clock a *parlementaire* and a bugler shall be at your service. Good-night."

The aide-de-camp saw us to our room, and we shivered ourselves to sleep.

The morning broke gloomy enough, the air portended snow, and before we had passed the last sentries of the Turks, a brisk wind skimmed along the road right into our faces. Towards mid-day, our escorting officer became distressed regarding the non-

appearance of the Servians, and we were steadily freezing, for we could not advance out of a walk within shot of either side.

Presently some indistinct shadows were seen on the road. Our officer ordered the bugler to sound a call. When he touched the mouth-piece of his instrument with his lips, he could not pucker his mouth into the proper form for blowing. His moustache was frozen stiff. The officer shook his sword at him. It was of no use. The bugle was dumb. The shadowy figures on our front now showed black against the snow, and they were falling into skirmishing line.

"They are preparing to fire! Sound the call!" shouted the officer as he pummelled the unfortunate bugler, who strove in vain to blow. I also became interested in the proceedings, and wanted to hide myself behind something. For those men in front were clearly meaning to fire; some were brushing the snow aside with their feet to make a firmer stand. We rubbed the bugler's mouth with snow, and let him have another try. This time an unmistakeable squeak trembled on the air. One audacious Servian in the advance, who was about to possibly commit murder by shooting one of our number, stayed his hand, placed it to his ear, and listened. We urged our bugler once more, and a clear blast thawed out of his instrument. The Servians looked at each other, then retired into the whirling snow, and were lost to view, while we congratulated ourselves and complimented the bugler on his performance. In a short period a strong body of men surrounded us and marched us into their camp. The outpost consisted of numerous dug-out semi-subterranean holes, thatched with reeds from the river bank. Into one of

these caverns we were invited, and soon we huddled round a log fire in the centre of the shanty. The Servian officer in command was profuse in his thanks for bringing home his countryman, and told me that he had already sent off notice of our arrival to General Peterhof, in command at Deligrad. At this my heart seemed to sink within me, for I was aware that Peterhof knew me well by sight. Doubtless I should be taken for a renegade and shot, probably not officially, but accidentally; and the distinguished order of the Takova sent to my people to soothe their grief and to express the sorrow of the Servian government at my untimely but heroic end. Luckily, our Turkish officer was already green with jealousy that the Servians should impress me with their amiability. "We must be back before the night is far advanced," was his anxiety which I earnestly fostered, for the Turkish Staff of Hafuz was to entertain me that night at dinner. But to wait the return of the orderly from Deligrad was almost imperative. We were now in the hands of the Servians, and must affect some civility. At last the snorting of a horse at full gallop on the road told us the messenger was nigh. In another moment, puffed and blown, and digging the snow from his eyes and ears, the orderly stepped down to the fire and communicated to our Servian host a message.

"The general," he said, "wishes the Englishman to stay the night at Deligrad. The *parlementaire* may go back, and if hostilities recommence in the interim, he shall have a safe conduct through Servia."

I clung to the Turkish *parlementaire* in spite of this generous hospitality. The Servian I had befriended evinced his gratitude by effusively kissing my

hand again and again, and still under escort we marched back into the neutral zone.

Before night had well set in my sailor friend and I were enjoying the hospitality of the Pasha's officers, and next morning found us *en route* to Nisch, after many cordial expressions from my would-be executioner of my pleasant visit, and hopes that I would renew it. After due consideration in regard to this matter, I eventually came to the conclusion that I would not. For one of the few Latin quotations I remember seemed to write itself in the snow: "*Nusquam tuta fides.*"

IV.

QUESTIONABLE QUARTERS.

Colonel Smyter, V.C.—"My Little Lot"—A Warm Welcome—Cholera!—A Ghastly Journey.

DURING the advance from the British frontier at Peshawur of Sir Sam Browne's army, up through the Khyber and onward towards Jellalabad, in the early winter of 1878, there was no better officer in Her Majesty's service than Colonel Smyter, V.C.

A tall, gaunt man, some six foot two, a striking figure he made when he rode at the head of his regiment of plucky little dare-devil Ghoorkas, few of whom stood more than six inches above the Colonel's waist-belt. Forbes had described this officer to me, expressing his admiration for his soldierly character and his affection for the genial amiability of the tall soldier's nature.

I was looking forward to a pleasant time with Smyter, V.C., since that intrepid war-correspondent had given me a chit of introduction to him. But my journey to his advanced position was fraught with adventure, and my acquaintance with heroic Smyter was, to say the least of it, by no means encouraging. I had left the British camp outside Jellalabad without having notified my intentions to head-quarters, since there might be some difficulty on the road which had to be passed before I should arrive at Smyter's command, and the anxiety of the officials for my safety might have delayed my departure until a convoy should have

been made up. My bearer was a Mussulman, a man of fine courage and alertness; but my syce was a Hindoo, who had a marked weakness for the safety of his own dusky skin.

So the syce I mounted on my baggage-camel, and Whewas Khan, my bearer, and myself would alternately share the smart little tat, or mountain pony my good friend Forbes had picked up for me at the beginning of the campaign.

Cholera had broken out severely in the Punjaub, and was stealing steadily up through the Afghan passes, proving a more ruthless enemy to the British soldier and his dusky brethren-in-arms than the most fanatical of the Afghan tribesmen. One afternoon we had left on the rocky plains of Chadeh a bivouac called Baribak. The heat was intense, some 114° in the shade during the day, and at night the thermometer stood 106°, and remained at that until the dawn, when the mercury immediately rose again with the sun. The stones littering the route were so baked with the sun's rays that it would have been difficult to have taken one up and to have placed it in one's pocket without fear of burning one's fingers.

My poor pony suffered much from his blistered feet, his temper being what I should imagine that of a performing bear's when dancing on hot tiles. Limping along painfully throughout the afternoon, toward sunset we approached the rocky eminences near Basawul, which were supposed to overshadow Smyter's encampment.

The rocks glowed like huge live coals in the fierce glint of the dying sun. The air was so thick and nauseating with the stench of dead camels, that one could hardly

breathe. As the sun dropped below the horizon, blood-red flashes of fire like gigantic rubies studded the plain in our immediate front, and to our disgust we found the departing light was glinting on the metal casing of biscuit tins and the *débris* of a deserted camp. Black night settled over the valley, and with it came a depression of spirits on our little party that was difficult to shake off.

It was, indeed, an unfortunate situation and a dangerous one, too, for after nightfall the local tribesmen had the cheerful wont of cutting up all camp followers and stragglers not yet within the British lines. I looked at my two servants. The syce was in a hopeless state of fear, but Whewas's teeth gleamed in the gloaming and whenever the Mohammedan showed his ivories I knew he was bracing himself up for an emergency. We kept the nervous groom between us, and steadily marched forward. The heat from the rocks flanking our left was like that of a blast from a furnace, and the air was so dense and stifling that it seemed like battling with a gauze shroud. Parched with thirst and sick with hunger we struggled forward, straining our eyes in search of the lost camp.

Presently a light leapt up out of the blackness. I immediately whispered a halt, now that like "will-o'-the-wisps" flecks of fire danced about in front of us. Could this be a bivouac of the enemy? I told my servant to remain in position while I crept towards the distant lights. I stumbled down the face of a deep-cut nullah, and on clambering up the opposite bank I could discern in the distant play of the fires a few white tents. It was the British encampment. I would have shouted for joy but that I knew that any noise would have

brought a sharp fusillade in our direction. I stole back to my servants, and we boldly marched towards the tents.

"Halt! Who come dah?" shouted the native sentry.

"Friend," I replied.

"Parse, fren alisvel!" answered the incoherent Goorkha.

The news of our approach rapidly spread. Out of a large marquee hurried two or three officers.

"Glad to see you," said one as I rolled out of my saddle.

"Qui hi," shouted another, "brandy peg low. Geldi Ghow."

In the twinkling of an eye a servant appeared with cooling draught, a big soda and brandy with a dash of snow in it from the Safed Koh, or White Mountain, which loomed over the valley. I greedily drained the peg.

"That's only to moisten your throat," said they. "Have another, just to quench your thirst—and then we will allow talking. You are the first we have seen for an age."

"Well," thought I; "this is indeed hospitable."

"So good of you to come! Why, it's Villiers—good fellow! Just in time for dinner," cried the officers in chorus.

My men went off with their kind, and I was hustled into the mess tent. As I seated myself at the table, faces, beaming with good nature, turned to mine. I inwardly congratulated myself. I had never met with more cordial hospitality in my life.

As I commenced to eat an orderly entered the tent

and whispered to one of the officers, who immediately got up and followed him. Then another orderly spoke to the man on my left.

"Excuse me, Villiers," and he hurriedly disappeared.

Soon the one sitting opposite me was summoned in the same mysterious way. By and by the first who had quitted the tent came back. All eyes were anxiously turned on him.

"Any more?" asked one.

"How many?" inquired another.

The answer slowly came: "Two, worse luck."

"Oh, that's nothing! We had three before the evening was through last night."

I turned to the man on my right:

"What are these good fellows talking about?"

"Fresh cases," he replied.

"Cases?" I exclaimed with no little astonishment. "Cases of what?"

"Well," he grimly smiled, "not champagne—that's for certain."

I must have still looked bewildered.

"Ah! ah! Good joke that," I rather stupidly rejoined.

"You don't understand," said he. "Why cholera, of course."

"Cholera! Oh, yes; I see," I faintly murmured. "Cholera!" I gazed in the kindly faces, and then it struck me that their uniforms seemed very familiar to me. My genial friends were doctors—they were all medicine men. Now I could understand their delight in seeing me—their sad lack of news. I had struck a cholera camp. These poor fellows had been isolated from the outer world for months. I almost

choked with emotion. My heart seemed to sink into my boots. I tried to pull myself together, poured out another glass of wine and was about swallowing it, when the doctors lifted their glasses, and drank my health.

"So good of you to take pity on us—just like you war correspondents. Don't seem to care a fig for anything."

"Well," thought I, struggling against a chill that seemed to freeze my heart, "anyway, I must keep up the reputation with which our profession has been so cordially accredited."

So I staggered to my feet and responded to the toast. I told them that as I was passing by I thought I would look them up—in my province as a war-correspondent it was only right—in fact, my duty. I protested that I was never happier in my life, and they could look upon me as a veritable newspaper—in fact, a special edition. I would give them all the news I contained.

After a short conversation—but a very long one to me—I shared the tent of one of the doctors, but not his slumbers. I was never so wide awake in my life, and I vowed that if I found myself alive at dawn I would hurry from that pestilent stricken camp before breakfast. During the night a hot wind sprang up, coming upon us like the breath from a baker's oven, choking us with dust and flaying our faces with burning particles of sand. Towards morning, lights flickered from tent to tent as the surgeons went about their work. The groans and wails of the doomed patients were heard above the soughing of the wind. The sun shot up from the horizon. It was day once more. But many brave men in that

camp of misery had died in the gloom of the previous night. The stretcher-bearers were already carrying their inanimate burdens to the little cemetery on the parched-up plain as I turned my back on the cholera-stricken camp.

The sun was well up when we gained the main road to the Khyber. The rocks began to glow once more under the fierce rays, warming up the valley to a heat one would think would sterilize and disinfect the most pestilent-ridden country in the world. Yet, clinging to the shadow of the rocks by the roadside, where they had sought shelter from the merciless sun, were corpses of stricken hillmen, who had come down from their lairs to cut up any stragglers such as we, but who had been taken with the deadly sickness while waiting for their victims. Never shall I forget the horrible nausea which held me all the way on this ghastly journey across the plains of Chadéh.

It was nearing sunset once more and we had not yet gained Smyter's command, when presently we saw a cloud of dust on the road coming in our direction.

"Well, sir, and where is your escort?" said an angry voice, as a tall, gaunt figure on a small grey horse rode toward me.

"I have no escort," I replied, "only my two servants."

"What, sir! Do you mean to tell me you have ridden here from Jellalabad without protection."

I was stammering out a reply, when the officer interrupted me.

"Damn! Don't think I am anxious about your carcass, sir! It's my men I am thinking about. If you were cut up it would be my duty to rescue your

remains, and probably in doing so I might lose one or two of my valuable little Ghoorkas. Do you understand, sir? Now you have arrived, kindly keep in camp and report yourself to me this evening." And the peppery officer rode on.

For the moment I had not the slightest idea who on earth he was, but after a wash and brush up I soon found out on my reporting myself to the general, and presenting my letter. It was Smyter, V.C., himself.

"Well," he said, as he glanced at Forbes' letter, "our first introduction was not a happy one. The fact is, only yesterday we lost three grass cutters. The hill men sliced them up and left them on the very road you came by this evening. Now, Mr. Villiers, I don't wish to make things unpleasant for you; but if you want to sketch outside the actual encampment, I will with much pleasure give you a few Goorkhas to look after you."

Smyter was as good as his word, and many a sketch I took while his plucky pigmies were scouting round about me.

V.

"DEAD HORSE PICKET."

The Resourceful Gaylor—A Sinister-looking Mount—A Scarecrow Skeleton—The "Picket"—Tommy Atkins and the Fig-trees—The Mystery of the Mare.

"WHAT the deuce are you up to?" I shouted, as I sprang from my bed. "You'll break the door down in a minute. Here! stop that row. I'm coming." And in another moment I opened the door.

"You must have taken too much soda with your whiskey last night. I've been trying to wake you for the last fifteen minutes!" said my friend and colleague, Drew Gaylor, the correspondent of a London daily.

"Well, what is it all about, now you're here?" said I. "At this time in the morning, too!"

"Put on your boots and come along," said my friend, as he looked at his watch. "In another hour the opening fight of the campaign for a surety will begin."

I looked at him as I sat on the edge of the bed, half-dazed with my sudden awakening.

"You're sure it isn't a fool's errand? For you know we've been sold with scares upon scares for the last five days."

"No, it's all right. I got the tip last night. The first regiment has been on the march for the last two hours already, and this time business is meant for a certainty."

"Well, Gaylor, it's very good of you to trouble yourself about me. But I haven't got a horse, so don't let me be a burden on you. I will come later."

"I've got a mount for you. It's all right. She is rather a sorry-looking beast, but she will carry you through the day for what work we want. Saddle, bridle, and all; so don't waste time. Get into your boots and come along. We shall be the only men there; and you'll have to thank me for a good start in this war, for we shall be back with the news before these other fellows know there's any fighting going on."

I was not long before I was out in the open and mounted on the grey mare Gaylor had so thoughtfully brought for me. My quarters were near the Ramleh railway station, and the Mediterranean washed the shingle just below my window.

We had to ride along the shore for a few hundred yards, skirting two famous obelisks which had stood monuments in Cleopatra's time, and were now lying half-buried in the sand and the scum and wash of the tideless sea.

I little thought at that moment that only a few years later I should be looking at one of those obelisks from the luxurious table of a dining-room on the Thames Embankment, and a few years after that be smoking a cigar in the moonlight while trying to make out the hieroglyphics on the face of the other in Central Park, New York City.

It was scarcely yet dawn, and we would not trust ourselves to the possibility of delay at the Rosetta Gate, for the draw-bridge was never down till sun-rise; so Gaylor made for the railway embankment, which was a very good idea, as the metals ran straight through

the enemy's lines, and by moving along the track we were bound to get somewhere near the front.

It was rather risky work in more senses than one, for there was a dull, grey mist hanging around us, forcing us to keep well between the rails for fear of a tumble down one or other side of the steep incline.

After the first excitement at suddenly finding myself on the eve of a big adventure, I pulled myself together and began to examine the steed that was carrying me. She was an iron-grey, weak-kneed looking brute, with her right ear lying flat along her neck, which gave her a very ugly and vicious aspect. I had seen horses up country in Australia look similar to my animal when on the point of buck-jumping, so I said to Gaylor:

"What are the bad points about this horse? She looks a vicious beast, anyway."

"Oh, it's all right. She's as quiet as a lamb now."

"Was she ever wicked?"

"Yes; she had a devil of a temper once, but I cured her."

"Well, how do you account for that ugly-looking ear?"

"That's the point," said my friend. "She showed a bit of temper one morning, for not only would she not let me mount her, but wanted to eat me at the same time. So I simply tried an old South African dodge, which is always efficacious—I gave the brute a clout across her right ear with a crowbar, which laid it flat along her neck, as you see, and it has remained there ever since."

"That was rather an extreme measure, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but it did its work. You can trust that

animal with your best girl now. She is as sweet a tempered beast as you ever straddled."

I was young and trustful in those days, and though it seemed a cruel way of horse-taming, I never doubted my friend's South African experiences for a moment, especially as the mare picked her way carefully over the sleepers, and never showed a bit of vice all through the day.

On approaching the village of Ramleh the line swerved to the left, and we passed through a station that had a suggestion of a Swiss chalet about it. At its back, on a hilly piece of ground which further on dipped down towards the sea, were a few rather fine-looking villas, and in a garden in the centre of a clump of palm trees was the "Hôtel de Beau Séjour." There was, however, not much of "beau séjour" now about the vicinity, for down by the station on the night before, under the Egyptian moon and the shadow of swaying palms, a bloody little skirmish had taken place. The model chalet-station had received an unbidden visit from the picturesque, ancient-garbed Bedouins of the desert. The ticket-office was riddled with bullets, and the signal-post for the down-line was so knocked out of gear that it was no longer in working order. This mattered little, for there was no train service nowadays, with the exception of the iron-clad truck on which a six-pounder had been mounted by our blue-jackets. The line was always clear to them; if not, they cleared it with common shell. There was not a living soul in or round this village of "Beau Séjour" when we passed through that morning, save a few stray dogs which had been sniffing about the bodies of two or three of our Bedouin friends who had bitten the dust in the night attack on the station,

and were now lying prone between the metals about a hundred yards away.

Out towards the desert on our right, the line ran along a high embankment over the plain, looking in its contortions like a veritable sea-serpent stranded on the sand. The head of the monster seemed to rise a little as it was lost in the enemy's camp at Kaffir-el-Douar, its tail trailing off through the chalet-station, where for the moment we had come to a halt.

A ration of canned beef and cold tea was consumed under the shadow of the booking-office. The sun, although even now only half an hour above the horizon, had dispelled the mist hanging over the desert, and had created mirages so wonderful in their realism that Gaylor and I felt inclined to race down to one of those fairy lakes and take a headlong dip in its cool sparkling waters.

About a mile from the station we came across Tommy Atkins in the shape of some men of the 60th Rifles. They were stripped to their flannels and hastily throwing up breast-works. From one trench a grim relic had been unearthed—an almost perfect skeleton of a man. Tommy, with his usual good humoured fun, had made a scarecrow of it, and had stuck it up on the top of the parapet as a wholesome warning to the enemy's sharp-shooters. Every moment fresh objects were being discovered as Mr. Atkins sweated and swore at his work. Now metal buttons, now belt-clasps, and now shreds of cloth. Examining some of the buttons I found them to be of English regimental pattern. But a belt-clasp was decidedly French. Why, of course. Here we were, preparing to fight on the very ground where, three quarters of a century ago, the English under Abercrombie

fought the French under Menon, and both found a common grave. Well, to what better purpose could the dust of those brave dead be put than to protect their living countrymen from the bullet of the foe? When Tommy Atkins realised that the bones were probably those that were once brethren in arms, there were no more scarecrows seen decorating the parapets of the trenches. Our scouts were already in touch with the enemy. Down by a fringe of palms, fig trees, and wild cacti, skirting a road running at right angles to the railway through the enemy's lines, little puffs of smoke floated upward.

Men were busy down there killing each other. Round and about a few mud huts the red fezzes of the Egyptians could be distinctly seen. But they did not cling to those huts for long. Our advancing line of skirmishers pressed them too hard, and they soon retired up the road in full retreat to the shelter of their works. An officer riding a white horse tried to rally the stragglers, but his charger was shot under him, and he hurriedly joined the retreating movement of his men. The horse he left behind lay dead in the shadow of a thick clump of palms at the angle of the road. That angle became historic during the campaign; it was always under the enemy's fire, and the enemy was always under our fire. I remember later in the day moving along that road, not knowing that the enemy's bullets swept so far. I was riding about three hundred yards behind a famous British officer and his aide-de-camp, when, without any warning, on approaching the angle he and his aide plunged down the left bank of the road, carefully avoiding that clump of trees. I thought this was strange be-

haviour until I neared the spot myself, when a sound, like the buzzing of mosquitos, around me and the twang of a bullet or two into the body of the dead horse, caused me to follow the example of that famous British officer. "Dead Horse Picket" became noted for the pungency of its situation, for being between two fires the Egyptian officer's charger was left unburied. The atmosphere in the vicinity of the picket made one plug one's nose with tobacco whenever the wind blew off the desert in the direction of the camp.

The miseries of war, even in this uninteresting petty skirmish, were only too apparent. In the shadow of one of the mud huts on the road-side lay a negro woman, dying. She had just been delivered of a child, which lay dead in the sand by her side. Bending over her was an Arab woman who had pluckily remained behind. I made signs that they need not fear, and gave the woman some water. This premature birth had been brought on by fright on account of the expected cruelty of the British soldiers, tales of which the retreating Arabs had dinned into the woman's ears.

With the exception of the dead horse and this poor creature no other casualties occurred in the first brush with the enemy, and Tommy Atkins was soon upon the road climbing up the fig-trees and quenching his thirst with the green, juicy pods. Occasionally a bullet came in his direction, but figs were a luxury, and Tommy didn't mind running a little risk. We ascertained, however, as the result of this skirmish that Arabi intended to remain simply on the defensive, that the enormous wall of sun-dried mud cutting the road and railway at Kaffir-el-Doua was to be our objective, and the Egyptian commander would not trouble us until

we attacked his stronghold. The whole affair was hardly worth the trouble of turning out of our bed so early, but still Gaylor and I were the only correspondents on the spot, and our telegrams would make good headlines for the newsboys to cry in the streets of London. So, therefore, we hurried back with the news. Dusty and weary, we at last sighted the walls of Alexandria. The drawbridge was just being raised up for the night as we spurred our horses on to it and trotted through the streets of the town to our quarters.

As we walked into the Hôtel Abbôt we could not hide our satisfaction in scoring over our fellow-correspondents. We took our seats at the table and commenced dinner. Our colleagues had not seen us all day, and they looked at us with inquiring glances. A gloom began to settle on their faces as they noticed our exultant mood, for there had been thunder in the air and they suspected that we had been where the storm had burst. There were only two London papers next morning which published the first infantry brush with the enemy in the Egyptian campaign of '82.

The vicious-looking brute I had ridden to the skirmish I saw no more. Three months afterwards I was requested by letter to visit the head-quarters staff in Alexandria.

After being served with a cup of coffee and a cigarette, one of the officers said:

"Were you ever acquainted with Mr. Gaylor, the war-correspondent, who has recently gone back to England?"

"Oh, yes. I knew him quite well."

"Good! We want to know whether you remember how many horses he had."

"Oh, I can tell you that easily enough. He had two, one of which I've ridden myself. One was a brown horse, the other a grey mare."

"A grey mare, Mr. Villiers? Do you know where he got it?"

"No."

"We put this question," said the officer, "because there is an old Arab who has been bothering us for many weeks now, and who accuses Mr. Gaylor of having taken the horse from him—or at all events of flinging him a napoleon and requisitioning the animal; and the Arab does not consider that adequate payment for his steed. He gives a full description of the grey mare. He says she has a broken right ear, which lies back on her neck."

"Ah!" I cried. "That Arab must be a lying old scoundrel. It is certainly a description of the horse I rode, but Gaylor himself broke her ear to cure her of bad temper."

The officers looked at me with astonishment. They were even more astonished when I told them of Gaylor's South African experiences in taming horses. They roared with laughter.

Then it dawned on me, and I laughed too.

VI.

WHY I BECAME A SHOPWALKER.

My Swedish Friend—I Serve in His Store—I am Guilty of Lèse Majesté—Odessa—A Russo-Scot.

WAR-CORRESPONDENTS have occasionally to get up to all kinds of devices in the pursuit of their calling. An incident at Yassy, in Moldavia, which made me change my profession for a period will always remain green in my memory. The Bulgarian atrocities had brought Russia and Mr. Gladstone down on the Turks, and a great crisis was impending in the East.

England had practically given Russia a free hand; but the question was whether Russia would take it. Rumours of mobilisation were rife, and I thought I would pay a visit across the Russian frontier to discern whether there were, as yet, any signs of the great avalanche which would one day sweep down from the north and obliterate the greater part of the Ottoman Empire from the map of Europe. My idea was a good one. Just then information of Russian movements would be of great journalistic value, but to put my idea into practice was quite another thing.

I resolved that I would get as near the Russian frontier as possible, so I left Constantinople for Yassy. Foreign journalists are not greatly loved by the Muscovite government, and in those days to be connected with an illustrated or other newspaper might incur the risk of arrest and deportation across the frontier.

Yet I must get there. But how was it to be done?

On arriving at Yassy I put up at the Hotel Binda. In the smoke-room of the place well-to-do city men used to congregate of an evening. Among them was a burly-looking Swede, who seemed to lead the conversation on most topics. He saw at once that I was an Englishman, and took great pride in airing his knowledge of the English tongue before his brethren in trade.

We grew quite friendly, and after the convivial meetings at the hotel, I would walk back with him to his shop and finish the evening in his little back parlour. We talked of the recent atrocities in Bulgaria, the attitude of England, the possibilities of a war, and the certainty that Russia was already moving large bodies of infantry, cavalry, and artillery towards the frontier.

Finding that my friend was anything but an admirer of the Russians, I, one night, told him my real object in coming to Yassy, and asked him to assist me in crossing the Russian frontier.

"Well," he replied, "that's not such a difficult matter. It's the getting back, my friend, which you will find not quite easy."

"Let me get across and I will manage to wriggle back," I laughed.

"Just as you like. You English are always up to some adventure. But," he continued, "if I assist you, you must do exactly as I say or you will possibly come to grief, and ruin me perhaps as well."

"First of all, I will take you on here as my new assistant. You must look after my shop for a few days,

and pretend to take a keen interest in the business as the man at the counter."

This part of the arrangement I did not quite relish, for the Yassy store resembled an ordinary English cheesemonger's, with an oil and colourman's thrown in. Pickled fish, onions, and dried caviare sweated in close proximity to limburger cheese, saurkraut, and many other rank-smelling delicacies which made the atmosphere sharp and spicy, and caused me to feel very bilious. Smoking was, mercifully, not prohibited by my employer, so the fumes of the pungent weed, which was between my lips all day, made the atmosphere of the shop a little more tolerable.

When my good friend thought I had been associated with him long enough, he set about his quarterly journey to Odessa to replenish his depleted store, and took me with him as his clerk. It was a dull, grey, winter's morning when the Preuth was reached. The ice on the river was already two feet thick, and the peasants, with their sleighs laden with goods, were creaking and jolting over the rough frozen floes and winding up the opposite bank towards the little log Customs house. The Swede enjoined me to keep close to him, but there was no necessity for this advice. I stuck to him like a leech, for he held the all-important passport, to be without which precious document on this jealously guarded frontier meant detention and perhaps imprisonment for many a day. We were all herded like cattle for a time, and then allowed to file through into the little passport office, where vigilant Muscovite *douanier* eyed us narrowly before returning our papers. I happened to have an unlit cigarette between my lips, which the officer, when restoring my

friend's passport, immediately noticed. He at once struck an heroic attitude, and stretching out his right hand, in stentorian tones, said:

"You must not smoke in the presence of the Tsar."

This was interpreted to me by my friend. The other travellers in the little office looked with blanched faces at my unheard-of audacity. I blushed scarlet, and then felt myself grow cold. How was it that my friend had not told me of the close proximity of so august a personage as the great white Tsar? This piece of presumption on my part, I thought, probably meant the mines of Siberia at least. Staggered by the prospect of this awful calamity, I still held the cigarette between my fingers.

"Headless dolt!" cried the officer, now flushed with anger.

I stood stunned as the enormity of my crime dawned on me.

"Drop the cigarette," whispered my friend. Once more the officer said: "You must not smoke in the presence of the Tsar."

Fearing to turn my head, I followed his outstretched arm with my eyes only, and there, on the stucco wall, I descried a wretched German oleograph portrait of Alexander the Second.

I came quickly to my senses, and began to titter with laughter, and presently I found myself outside the passport office, my Swedish employer having hustled me out of the presence of the irate Russian officials, intimating to them, with profuse apologies, that I was a little weak in my head.

"Be more careful, friend," whispered my companion. "Suppress your mirth, for you are among

a serious people, who look upon their ruler as next to the Great Redeemer. You may smoke now; it will quiet your nerves and probably stop that infernal grin of yours." For I was still merry over that ghastly oleograph.

When we arrived at Kircheneff, according to my friend's instructions, I put up at the Hotel St. Petersburg while he went on to Odessa. Meantime I found plenty of work both for pen and pencil, for the place was packed with soldiers of all arms, and for miles around the city the camps were stationed. The mercury was down far below zero, and the trees on the boulevard were sparkling with their covering of frost. The winter had set in in earnest.

Now I had arrived in this Russian city the difficulty was for me to do any work. A sketch-book was out of the question; suspicion would be aroused at once, and I should be arrested and practically lost to my paper. I had to fall back on my thumb-nails and shirt cuffs instead, and terribly cold work it was in that bitter atmosphere. One morning I nearly lost a thumb with frost-bite. But for the harbour of the steaming tea-houses many a time I think I should have been frozen stiff in the streets. The keen winds would pierce almost the thickest furs and the cold blast froze my hair stiff and coated my moustache with a fringe of snowy icicles, when I would rush into a tea-house and thaw myself in its heated atmosphere, where from far below zero one was suddenly in a temperature of some 70°. These places of entertainment were mostly kept by Jews. The walls were hung with cheap German coloured prints of battle scenes, and in all the rooms was the portrait of the Tsar, which everybody saluted

on passing. Lively tunes were wound out of a musical instrument at the end of the principal saloon, which resembled a barrel organ supplemented with drum and cymbal. The place was reeking with the fumes of Russian leather and rum, for that spirit, with lemon and sugar, was always served along with each pot of tea. The concentration of troops on the Preuth was a veritable mobilisation for active service. The forces already about Kircheneff were being augmented every day by fresh detachments of infantry, of cavalry, and batteries of artillery, all converging on the road which led to Constantinople. Like a dammed-up river, fed by numerous little streams, ever swelling in volume on the verge of breaking into flood, so was this great army, making ready to pour itself into Roumania and deluge Turkey.

My visit to Kircheneff was repaying me for my trouble, and after each day's work I would return to my hotel and dine comfortably, feeling well satisfied with myself when I collected my notes from my thumb and cuffs and transferred them to my note-book, for I had been in the place three days and was not even suspected. I would always manage to take my meals alone, to avoid conversation. One night, however, when I had my table as usual to myself, I noticed that my loneliness was attracting attention. Some officers at an adjacent table were looking intently in my direction. I grew hot all over, and kept my eyes busy on the edibles before me. Presently I felt that one of them was crossing to my table, and a moment later I was sensible of a tall, gaunt figure standing at my side.

"Ye'r an Englishmon," the tall figure whispered,

but with the unmistakable accent of the denizens of the Land-o'-cakes.

I lifted my eyes to the face of a man about six feet two, with large blue eyes and a big yellow beard, who was dressed in a Russian infantry uniform.

"Pray sit down," I replied, as I handed him a chair. "Yes, I am an Englishman, and, by Jove! you're a Scotsman, and wearing a uniform we Britons do not usually love. How is it?"

"Well, well," answered the Scot, "though in Russian uniform I am not a fighting man, but a paymaster, and there are many more of my countrymen so employed. We have good pay and an easy time. One thing, however, I am still a Briton, although I have been in the Russian service for twenty years. But, though sorely tempted, I would not be naturalised and don't ever intend to become a Russian, and that is why I was so glad to meet a countryman. Now what are you doing here? My Russian friends at the other table are rather suspicious, and want to know who and what you are."

"Can I trust you?" I whispered.

He nodded his head.

"Then, my newly-made friend, they must not know who I am, or I shall be imprisoned or sent back to Roumania sooner than I desire. I am a newspaper correspondent."

He gave a gasp of surprise.

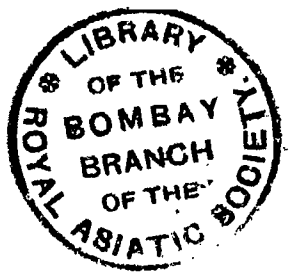
"How on earth did you get across the frontier?"

"Listen. Ask the waiter for another packet of cigarettes and some more kümmel, there's a good fellow, and I will tell you my story."

After I had finished he chuckled to himself,

"You deserve to get out of this without a mishap," said he. "I will now rejoin my friends for a time and allay their suspicions. Have no fear, but take my advice, clear off as soon as you can."

As luck would have it, my Swede arrived from Odessa by the last train that evening. At ten the next morning we crossed the frontier. On the same afternoon we were safely in Yassy, and by the night mail I was on the way to England with probably one of the most important budgets of sketches and correspondence I have ever collected for my paper.


LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

VII.

MY FRIEND CORPORAL DUNBAR.

The Eve of Tamai—My Friend Corporal Dunbar—He Does Me a Good Turn—Herbert Stewart—The Battle—Bennet Burleigh—*Sergeant* Dunbar—*Lieutenant* Dunbar—The Good Turn I Owed Him.

"SAY, sir, don't you think you had better lie down? Here, you are just in the line of the lead."

I had been peering through the gloaming, trying to make out the distance of the little spurts of flame flickering in the direction of the foot-hills in our immediate front, when a friendly corporal of the 42nd Highlanders touched my shoulder, and suggested that I should seek the cover of a hill of sand behind which the front face of our square was lying. There was not much cover anywhere in the wretched position the British force found itself before Tamai on the night of the 12th of March, in the year 1884. We had marched from Baker's Zareba shortly after noon till sundown over a scorching, stony plain, studded here and there with cactus and mimosa bush, right straight in the teeth of the enemy, and were now bivouacing on a sand patch between the outlying foot-hills and the base of the chain of rugged volcanic mountains which run parallel to the whole length of the Red Sea Littoral. The enemy were already sighted on the low black rocks of granite and syenite in our front. Splashes of light were flickering like flecks of fire in a distant hamlet as

the sinking sun lights up its window-panes. But not so suggestive of peace were those reflections from the hills. The broad barbs of the spears of Osman Digna's warriors gave out the light, now blood-red with the dying sun, as if already reeking with gore.

Presently those broad shafts of fire seemed to move forward, and the "fuzzy-wuzzy" warriors began to skirmish in our direction. Springing lightly over the scrub, they wriggled along on their stomachs, when, coming to patches of sand, seeking every little bit of cover of rock or mimosa, the Arabs began to show up in considerable force. Not wishing to court an attack till the morrow, the General ordered our mountain guns to open fire. A few beautifully-placed shrapnel shells checked the advance of the Arabs and knocked the devil out of them for the night, so that we were eventually left in peace to cook our rations. Mimosa bushes were cut down, and a Zareba was formed round our position to stop a sudden inrush on the part of the enemy. Our men ate their suppers, smoked their pipes, and soon, rolling themselves up in their blankets, sought slumber. The wooing was not long with Mr. Atkins, and soon the simmering, heaving, fretful pulsations of a sleeping army were heard on all sides.

I was not well pleased with our position; to me it seemed excessively insecure. On our right flank was a mass of rock a few hundred yards distant, and for some reason not occupied by us. In our front, not more than a thousand yards off, were some six thousand of the most daring fighting men in the world, lying *perdu* in a network of rocks and corries. We lay out in the open on a plain slightly shelving upward toward the enemy, an excellent target to any Arabs bold enough

to creep round our flank and occupy that mass of rock unsecured by us. I had already planned in my mind the attack which the Arabs might make—a galling fire in the middle of the night from the ominous-looking rocks on our right rear, while a few thousand spearmen would attempt to rush our zareba, and then there would be the devil to pay. I took my revolver out of its case and kept it ready to hand.

Did I sleep? I wonder if I slept? That unoccupied rock bothered me. It seemed to grow into a mountain that grew bigger and bigger, till the whole adjacent ground was filled with its immensity. Whether I had slept or not, I now found myself suddenly and very unmistakably awake. The simmering mass of humanity around me was also on its feet, and also very wide-awake. The force, with the low growl of expletives peculiar to Tommy Atkins when disturbed from his slumber, was struggling to fix bayonets. A sharp rattle of musketry from the foot-hills, the shriek of bullets overhead, and the distant beating of war-drums, was the motive of Tommy's sudden awakening. I looked anxiously towards the mass of rock; it was still unoccupied, and, so far, we were safe. We stood to our arms for several hours; it was a desultory fight, all on one side, for we never returned a shot. Like summer rain, pit-a-pat the enemy's fire fell, now dying away to a few dropping shots, when again there would come a brisk sprinkle of bullets. It is a very uncomfortable situation, for motionless troops are always uneasy, when a sharp cry there or a groan here tells that bullets are finding their billets. An inanimate form was carried past me by two comrades towards the red lamp marking the doctor's quarters. Here and there a sharp clatter would notify

that a bullet had struck a mess tin or commissariat box. In the middle of the square a horse, which had been shot in the withers, lay struggling, vainly trying to gain his feet. Pit-a-pat! pit-a-pat! the bullets kept falling and stirring up little puffs of dust on the open ground in front of our zareba.

"There is no dashed fun in this sort of fighting," Tommy growled. "When will that blooming sun come up and show us where to shoot?"

I had at the moment walked up to the front face of the square, when my corporal friend already alluded to manifested his solicitude for my personal safety. Corporal Dunbar—for that I found to be his name—had now mysteriously disappeared. There was no one else of a communicative turn of mind near me, for the men were sullenly dozing, in spite of the occasional twang of the bullet. I sprawled on the sand and looked up at the stars. They were growing fainter and fainter. Now Venus grew pale; then the Great Bear faded; then Orion gradually waned and died out in the lilac dawn. I was thinking how many of us would be looking on those stars before another dawn melts them into space, when a tall, gaunt figure, carrying something under his great-coat, strode between me and the brightness of the coming day. Then it stooped down and whispered: "Would ye like a wee drap o' rum, sir?" It was my good friend the Scottish Corporal once more.

"Dinna be feart, sir," he continued. "Tak' a sup. Thae fuzzy-wuzzies hae spoilt the taste o' rum for at least one of us, so it's all right. We won't miss it. Drink!"

I took a long pull at the corporal's rum, and never was spirit less harmful; it drove the chill of the night from my veins, and braced me up for the coming struggle.

"My worthy friend," said I to the corporal, "let me do you a good turn for this. Come and see me at the home of Levi, 'the famous merchant of Suakim,' and I will give you something better than Passover cakes. We will drink to the utter defeat of the fuzzy-wuzzy if we get out of this."

The sun came up at last, looking, in the lingering haze of the plains, like a large, luminous, over-ripe apricot. The enemy's sharpshooters slunk back into the purple shadows of the khor as the glorious day burst upon us. Now, left in peace for a time, our men prepared their breakfasts, then folded their overcoats, and made ready for the coming fray.

From Baker's zareba came our cavalry, right in the eye of the sun. The handsome face of their gallant leader, Herbert Stewart, radiant with the spirit of war upon it, glowed in the morning light. At 8.30 we moved out from the zareba towards the enemy, our two brigades in echelon, the second under General Davis in front, the first under Buller about 700 yards in rear. I was watching Buller's square forming up when the sound of rapid firing was heard in the direction of Davis' square. The correspondent of the *Times* and I resolved to see what was going on at the front, so we mounted and rode towards the leading brigade. Approaching it we found the square broken. The front face and part of the right flank had been charged by a strong force of the enemy, which had sprung out of a deep nullah about a hundred yards in our front. I rode up behind the 65th just as their flank was being broken. Our advance had been suddenly arrested, like a great wave striking a boulder, and the Arabs, now pressing their attack on our flanks, had forced their way through a gap at

the angle between the 42nd in front and the right face of the 65th, which regiment had been hurled back upon the Marines, who were hurrying up to support. The enemy came bounding in before the Marines could recover from their momentary disorder. Some say the men of the 65th gave way; if they did, it was done slowly and reluctantly. To me they seemed to be moving backward to keep in touch with the Marines and to preserve the square formation, for several men coolly knelt and deliberately took aim as the fuzzy-wuzzy enveloped our flank. But even British pluck must fail sometimes, and that nullah held too many of those bounding, reckless dare-devils. Nothing could stop them for the time—neither Gatlings, nor Gardners, nor Martini-Henrys, nor the cold steel; they forced their way into the square, and, unfortunately, they came to stay for the moment. Though a short period, it was long enough to teach Mr. Atkins some respect for the fighting qualities of the Hadendowahs. Unless a bullet smashed a skull or pierced a heart they came on furiously, and even when the paralysis of death stole over them, in their last convulsions they would try to cut, stab, or even bite. Among that howling, bounding mob of fanatics even little boys came brandishing sticks, led recklessly on by their parents to the very muzzles of our rifles. When once in our square an absolute *mêlée* ensued. In rallying groups our men tried to stand their ground, but slowly yet surely a retrograde movement was compulsory. We were getting the worst of it. Enveloped in smoke we could hardly distinguish friend from foe. For a moment or two firing ceased, and then an appalling silence seemed temporarily to reign, as a deadly hand-

to-hand conflict commenced, in which both sides were too busy to give tongue. An occasional rallying shout from an officer was heard, and at one period, when things looked very bad indeed, I could distinctly hear the voice of that plucky war-correspondent, Bennet Burleigh, shouting:

"Give it them! Hurrah! Three cheers—hurrah!"

Many a man who feared the day was lost rallied on that cheer, and thought things must be improving, and fought all the better for the belief. A certain general has said that "War correspondents are the drones of the army." A few more drones like Burleigh when Tommy Atkins is in a tight corner would not be detrimental to the success of the British Army in the field.

How I got out of that fight I hardly know to this day. A great source of anxiety to me was my horse. This animal was the only one I could procure at Suakim, and had been condemned by the military authorities as unsound. He could stand on his four legs and move, it was true, so to me he was better than nothing; but in an unlooked-for emergency such as this he gave me grave anxiety, for, not knowing his weak points, I was always speculating as to what the brute would do next as I struggled through the human *débris* of the broken square. Once or twice, as I lay flat along the animal's back urging him onwards with my spurs, Arabs would leap out at me from the smoke and poise their spears ready to strike, but refrained risking a thrust at one who was moving so swiftly. I fired my revolver at any dusky form I saw emerging from the smoke; but still the figures flitted. Regulation revolvers are not much use against fuzzy-wuzzy; he seems to swallow the

bullets and come up smiling like the proverbial conjuror. If my horse had gone lame or played any circus tricks at that moment, a blanket and a narrow trench would have been my coverlet and resting place that night.

How Sir Redvers Buller's intact square, moving on over the very ground we had left, diverted the attention of the enemy, giving us breathing time to rally and re-form and advance in line to recapture our lost guns, is a matter of history I will not dwell on here. The Black Watch suffered terrible losses. Many of their non-commissioned officers were cut down in the first mad rush. I was therefore rather troubled about my newly-made friend, Dunbar.

But one day, after my budget of sketches had been posted to the *Graphic*, Corporal Dunbar walked into my lodgings at Suakim. We had our promised smoke and chat, and I found my friend no ordinary individual —keen, quick-witted, and every inch a soldier.

It was New Year's Day of the following year, and the British forces for the relief of Khartoum were concentrating at Korti. For hundreds of miles the Nile was alive with boats, crowded with British soldiers, rowing, towing, and sailing their whalers up the dreary reaches of the river. I was waiting outside the postal tent while the British mail was being sorted, when a cadaverous, sunburnt individual accosted me. He was in shreds and tatters. It was difficult to discover by his sun-faded trews that he was of that famous Highland regiment, the Black Watch. The red heckle had disappeared from his feather bonnet. His face, however, made up for this deficiency. All shades of red were there, from the pinkish hue of his skinned nose to the deep tan of his hollow cheeks.

"Mr. Villiers, don't you remember me?" said the tattered soldier.

"Well—eh—I hardly—— By Jove! Corporal Dunbar!"

"No longer Corporal, sir, but Sergeant now," said he modestly.

"Well, I am mighty pleased to see you. But what a plight you are in! You have evidently had a tough time of it, Sergeant. Why, your mother wouldn't know you!" I turned him round and looked at him once more.

"It's those boats, sir. We Highlanders are not used to boats. Those patches you are looking at now, sir, they're made of biscuit-tin and sail-cloth—hard, sir, but saves you from losing leather. I have just been to the post," he continued, "and find my dear old mother has sent me these." He held up a bottle containing white tabloids. "They are thirst quenchers. I shan't want them, however, sir, as I go with the force moving up the Nile. You are going across the desert with Stewart's lot. They will be useful to you—you take them, sir!"

Anything from old England out in those wild parts was precious enough. I was reluctant to accept the bottle, but as he threatened to spill the contents on the desert I took it.

"Dunbar, you have befriended me once more; mind, if ever I can be of service to you, now don't be afraid to ask me." He laughingly promised, and we parted.

I often blessed his dear old mother on that long dreary, thirsty desert march, which we subsequently made to Gubat, for the happy idea of the thirst quenchers.

Some years after the Nile expedition I was reading a daily paper in my club in London when my eye caught a paragraph that ran something like this :

"For exceptional bravery in the field, Sergeant-Major Dunbar to receive Her Majesty's Commission."

I drank Lieutenant Dunbar's health and wished him further promotion. Two years afterwards, I was quietly painting in my studio when a sharp ring at the bell brought me to the door. On the threshold was a smart Bond Street type of gentleman in frock coat, enamelled boots, and an orchid in his button-hole. He raised his hat and said, with a suspicion of a slight drawl in his speech :

"Why, don't you know me, Mr. Villiers ? "

I was fairly staggered for the moment. Then the memory of him flashed on me.

"Come in," said I, "and sit down. Have a cigar, and tell me all about it."

"I have no time for that just now. I have come simply to ask you for the service you promised me."

"Right ! Fire away, Mr. Dunbar."

"The fact is, Villiers," he slightly hesitated, "I am —eh—I am going to be married to-morrow, and I want you for best man."

VIII.

"PLAYING PETER."

The Greco-Turkish War—Greek Valour—Volo—Kinnaird Rose—The Stampede to Larissa—I Keep the Gates of the British Consulate—A Greek Falstaff—The Consul and the Nurses—An English Volunteer—The Greek and his Revolver.

I WILL not enter into the question regarding the reason why Greece went to war with Turkey. The long and the short of it was, she was totally unprepared for any belligerent emergency whatever, and could not have had the slightest chance of success, at any time, for two prime reasons. First of all, she had practically no system of commissariat, which is the first necessity of successful campaigning; and, secondly, with one exception, she had no general officers who were apparently conversant with the ordinary tactics of war. There was not the slightest preparation for any reverse. Hardly a stretcher or bandage ready for a single casualty, nor a crust of bread or drink of water, with any certainty, to be found anywhere when once the troops were in action. Greece suffered terribly by her arrogance and folly. But in her terrible struggle more than one battle was fought valiantly and well by her only general, Colonel Smolenitz. Under him some of the Greeks fought like men, enduring hardships of a nature commensurate in severity with those endured by the soldiers of any campaign I have witnessed during my vagrant life.

It was at Velestino I saw the first battle. I arrived in Volo, the famous port of Thessaly, from the Piræus on the afternoon of Saturday, the 24th of April. The ship which carried me to my destination was one chartered by many patriotic Greeks in Athens and fitted up as a hospital boat. The Red Cross service on board was conducted by ladies and gentlemen of the best Athenian families, who, with great self-denial, devoted their time and money to this humane cause. As I lay in the hold, where troops had only a few hours previously lain groaning from the soreness of their wounds, I was half-poisoned by the fumes of the disinfectants permeating the ship, and many of the live stock these poor fellows had left behind them found comfort and sustenance in me. These pests always seem to look upon war correspondents as fair game, and if they had forgotten me on this occasion I might have felt slighted. Irritated by these old campaigning parasites and with a ghastly sick headache, I landed. It was a hot, sultry afternoon for April, and the town lay quiet, for in spite of war the noontide siesta, as in most Eastern cities, was in its full dreaminess. Volo was sleeping. But, great heavens, to what an awakening!

As the hospital ship touched the shores of the quay, one of the three gentlemen awaiting our approach hurried on deck. In evident alarm the doctors and nurses crowded round him, for his face was leaden in hue, and his eyes were swimming with tears. In a low voice, trembling with emotion, he addressed his compatriots. A suppressed shriek came from one of the little crowd, a chair was hurriedly brought forward, and the matron of the ship fell fainting into it.

"Mr. Villiers," said one of the Greek doctors, "kindly quit the vessel as soon as you can, for we shall want all the space we can get. There is news of a great disaster to our arms, and the wounded are expected here every moment."

My servant and I hurried ashore with our luggage and made for the Hotel Minerva. The town was still sleeping. Soon the stillness was broken by the rattle of a solitary carriage on the main street. Then suddenly the vehicle turned into the narrow thoroughfare leading to my hotel, and, grey with dust, drove up to the doors. Two figures tumbled out of the fiacre. One a clean-shaven youth, the other a man with a big yellow beard. Both were very dirty and dusty, and evidently very thirsty, for the first words that simultaneously burst from their parched lips suggested a drink, and a long one at that. The yellow-bearded man seemed a familiar figure to me, though when an individual is disguised in dust it is difficult to trace him. As he dug the dirt from his optical cavities with his knuckles, two big blue eyes began to glimmer from their depths.

"Why, it's Kinnaird Rose, for a dollar," said I.

And so it was. Then my old friend of Plevna days told me the story. The fight, the sudden retreat, the stampede on to Larissa, the wild shooting at one another throughout the night, and the terrible cry of "The Turks! The Turks are upon us!" The trying vicissitudes of that ghastly night, over the memory of which barely a short day had passed, seemed to have affected my friend's nerves considerably. He told me that the army was a mere rabble, its retreat an utter rout, and the defeated battalions, spiritless and broken, were

making their way towards Pharsala, or to the sea-board of Volo.

The inhabitants were, at last, awakened from their siesta, for the dire news was fast spreading through the town, though the full extent of the disaster was not yet known. The crowds of gloomy-looking soldiers pouring through the streets, for very shame would not recount the full measure of the humiliation of the Greek forces; and, indeed, the majority of these knew but little of what had occurred, for they were mostly cowardly malingerers, hundreds of whom were always loitering in rear of their regiments, and formed, I was only too soon to discover, the inevitable advance-guard of a Greek retreat.

My servant had found me a room in a small hotel in which a chair and table constituted the sole furniture. Unrolling my valise on the floor, I threw myself upon it and tried to sleep. This was impossible, for my head was still throbbing with the poison of the ship. Presently the murmur of the streets grew into a low roar. On looking out of the window I found the road crowded with panic-stricken peasantry, and a sprinkling of those who, by courtesy, were called irregulars, though in reality cut-throats and brigands, the scum of Thessaly, armed and let loose upon the country, ostensibly to wreak vengeance on the Turks, but who invariably gave the enemy a wide berth and looted their own people whenever they got a chance. Suddenly I bethought myself of a cinematograph camera and films I had with me. The latter, if exposed to the light, would be completely ruined, so I resolved to house them from a possible raid from these ruffians in the British Consulate. The red, white, and blue of the Union Jack

shone in the rays of the Consulate lamp as it hung over the balcony, below which a crowd of excited citizens had gathered. I rang the bell at the gate. It was immediately answered by a voice from the balcony. I gave my name and was at once admitted. The Consul and his wife were at home. In fact, they had been for many hours very much at home to the panic-stricken people, and were exceedingly glad to see an Englishman come upon the scene, for, with the exception of his wife, her maid, and an old woman-cook, the Consul had been entirely deserted by his servants. He was much fatigued with his exertions in suppressing the terror of the crowds of women and children clamouring for safety at the Consulate gate; so I offered my services to relieve him for a time, which were readily accepted. The Consul's latest news was that the Crown Prince's army had retreated in hot haste to Pharsala, leaving the road to Volo entirely open to the Turks, and its wretched inhabitants to their fate. No wonder the poor, terror-stricken citizens rallied round the flags of the foreign Consulates, for they knew the atrocities the Turks were capable of, and surely, of all people, I was acquainted with the barbarity of the Mussulman, for the massacres at Yeni and Eski-Zagra, in the Balkan Peninsula, to which I was an eye-witness, though twenty years ago, were fresh in my memory. I remembered how I saw men, women, and children slaughtered. Houses were battered to their very foundations. Nothing was left but their charred smoke-stacks, looking like grim funeral columns studding a cemetery which had yawned up its dead. The gay, ribbon-bedecked heads of young girls, lying in the gutter, were bones of contention between swine and

dogs. The wells were reeking with corpses and the streets slippery with blood. So these poor people who paced backwards and forwards in front of the Consulate gate that night, sobbing, shuddering, and clamouring for protection, enlisted my heartfelt sympathies. For what horrors the dawn might bring them!

My gate-keeping had also its touch of comedy. Early in the night two Greek gentlemen arrived, and brushing aside the women, rang the bell. I found that one of them was an important official of Larissa, who had been the first to leave his post to seek safety in Volo. I could almost have laughed in mockery at his fright and solicitations for admission; for this gentleman a few days ago was haranguing the citizens of Larissa to "Up and arm themselves, and fight the enemy to the bitter end." And he had spent quite a little fortune in supplying his gallant countrymen with guns and ammunition. This Greek Falstaff was the first to turn tail. Of course, the gate was closed to him.

What a rich man I might have become with the tips offered me on that memorable night! One wealthy merchant would make it worth my while to succour his wife and child. For himself he did not care; he would face the Bashi-Bazouks bravely if they came. But his poor wife and child! And there was something else—and he cautiously looked round as he whispered even lower to me—a small Chubb's safe, containing the hard-earned money of many years. Would I befriend him, and so much per cent. would be my reward?

The Consul had informed the four English nurses,

working in the Volo hospital, in case of danger to rely on him. To-night the situation evidently warranted this action on the part of the ladies of the Red Cross, who soon arrived; but, to our astonishment, they had generously brought their wounded with them, resolving not to leave their charges to the mercy of the fanatical Turk. For the moment these poor sufferers could not very well be turned back, so we made them snug and comfortable on the ground floor. A little later the bell was rung in rather a peremptory manner by a lady in black. A line of stretchers, bearers, and carts with wounded were standing in the road. This lady was the matron of the hospital, and had brought on all the remaining invalids of that establishment, also the whole paraphernalia necessary to hospital comfort. The Consul and I were fairly staggered for the moment with the lady's audacity. When we pointed out to her that the Consulate was reserved for British subjects, or in emergency alien women and children, but certainly not Greek soldiers, wounded or otherwise, the lady fumed and stormed, and threatened to inform the British public by means of a London newspaper of the inhuman conduct of the Consul, and she flounced back to the hospital with her contingent of invalids trailing after her. As it was, the wounded men we had already succoured might become a serious danger, for if the Turks had entered the town fighting that night, and discovered Greek soldiers lying *perdus* in the Consulate, the British flag would have been little protection.

Towards morning there came a timid knock at the gate, and a young soldier stood saluting in front of me.

"Is this the British Consulate?" said he, and I discovered him to be an English volunteer. He had been through all the fighting round Larissa, and for many days had not had more than a few crusts of bread to keep body and soul together. Foot-sore and hungry, he now sought the protection of the Consulate. I was sorry for him, but he was the very last man to apply at the gate. He had broken the Foreign Enlistment Act by fighting for an alien Power, and was practically an outlaw. But "blood is thicker than water." He was a Britisher, so I gave him a chance, which, I am glad to say, he did not accept, for it proved him to be a solid Britisher, after all. I put the proposal in the most delicate way possible.

"Now," said I, "supposing you happen to go down to the beach and take a dip in the sea—for I am sure a bath would do you good—and, when you come out, don't trouble to find your clothes, but hurry up here. I will rig you out in civil attire; but don't stand at attention here in that costume. It's an insult to the British Consulate."

After partaking of some little refreshment, my foot-sore and weary visitor staggered back to the front, coming to the conclusion he would stick to the cause he had in a weak moment so generously espoused.

Just before the dawn things quieted down a bit, and I fell asleep. It seemed to me that I had hardly closed my eyes when again I was on my feet. The Consul and his wife were also on the look-out. Shots were most distinctly to be heard in the distance. Presently the shooting took place all round us. The reason of this desultory fusillade at last dawned on me. It was the Greek Easter, and, of course, the townsfolk were cele-

brating it in the usual way, in spite of the close proximity of the dreaded enemy, in letting off their pistols. There is a type of Greek who will at any time pull a revolver from his pocket and fire it off if he is over-joyous, or feels unwell, or is at all dull. In fact, he fires off a gun as he would ignite a cracker or burst a paper bag, or make some noise to show the world that he is uneasy and restless. Sometimes the soldiers used to startle their officers by suddenly firing their rifles into the air on the line of march or in the trenches. A few days afterwards I met with an incident illustrating this curious trait in the Greek character. A young subaltern was very much annoyed with this odd firing by his men, so when next this offence was committed after strict orders to the contrary, he sent the culprit to the rear for the captain of his company to deal with him. Later on the offending soldier was marched back to the subaltern, condemned by the captain, as punishment for his crime, to be placed first in the firing-line. And even then he was wounded in the back. It strikes me that, with British soldiers, insubordination couldnot be suppressed if the punishment inflicted on that Greek soldier was meted out to them.

Directly the sun was up, I rode towards the Turkish lines and discovered things not quite so bad as people imagined, for arriving at Velestino I found General Smolenitz had thrown the remnant of the Greek forces across the Volo road, and had stopped the victorious march of the enemy for a time. The seaport was covered. Steamships were able to ply safely all day in removing the people from their perilous position. They were loaded up to their gunwale with men, women,

children, goods, and chattels, odd pieces of artillery, shot and shell, and all kinds of government stores from the municipal offices and magazines, till at last Volo was deserted but for a few hundred unhappy people who were hopelessly left to face the incoming Turks.

IX.

HOW WE SAVED VOLO.

Campaigning in Clover—Our Mission to the Turks—An International Enterprise—An Anxious Moment—Were the Greeks Playing Fair?—All's Well that Ends Well.

LUCKILY I was well housed during the fighting in front of Volo, for the British Consul insisted on my residing at the Consulate. To me it was campaigning in luxury. From the balcony of the Residence I could always see of a morning when the Turks opened fire up on Velestino plateau; then I would drive to the battle-field, taking my bicycle with me in the carriage, send the vehicle out of action, and at nightfall, after the fight, I would trundle back—just an hour's spin—down the hill, to dinner, and the society of the Consul and his charming wife. The day the Turks cut the Greek forces in two and Smolenitz was in full retreat to Halmayos, Volo was once more at the mercy of the enemy, and the panic was worse than ever. That night at dinner I suggested to the Consul that, as the municipal authorities had quitted the city and the Government officials were in full retreat, we should take the town in hand, and try to prevent the Turks from wrecking the place by bearding the lion in his den, and boldly going into the Moslem lines to intercede with Edhem Pasha on behalf of the remaining inhabitants. After much persuasion and considerable delay, we found that only the French Consul would personally join us, though

the Italian elected to be represented. We then communicated with the Greek war vessels in the harbour. The Admiral told us we could do just as we pleased, and that his ships would clear out and leave the entire situation to the Consuls. We hired two closed carriages, and to make the little cortège more impressive we placed French and English bluejackets, with their respective colours and flags of truce, conspicuously fluttering on the box-seats and started at midnight, so as to arrive at the Turkish outposts at dawn, the Greek ships of war illuminating our path with their search-lights till that desirable time arrived. It was a rough climb for the horses and slow; and it was just on the eve of dawn when we arrived at the first outpost. There was much speculation all the way up at the possibility of the Turkish sentry, being dazed and puzzled by this unusual and unique display, or in sheer fright, opening fire upon us; so I discounted the latter contingency by sitting with my back as near as possible to one of the carriage lamps. For by what I had recently seen of the shooting accuracy of Turkish soldiers, if an outpost took the trouble of aiming at the candles, I flattered myself that I should be comparatively safe from any casualty. However, nothing of so exciting a nature happened, and I had fallen asleep when the carriage suddenly stopped, and in the grey of the morning two, apparently bundles of rags, with muskets sticking up out of the folds, stood on either side of us. We were now on the Velestino ridge at the entrance of a narrow gorge which opened out on to the plain.

The Moslem forces were already drawn up in quarter-columns of battalions, and ready for the advance on the doomed town. We were just in time! It was a

remarkably picturesque and weird sight, this ever-victorious army—a ragged, scarecrow-looking host, their red fezzes in the first glow of the sun looking like shaggy poppies waving across the vast plain, and below the fez the black heart was visible. Of the majority of the men the faces were brutal and sullen, and boded no good treatment to any who might fall into their clutches. We had no difficulty with the officer of the outpost in proving that our mission was a pacific one, so we at once pushed on, a good two miles, towards the head-quarters, while the whole army wondered at our coming.

And an extraordinary show we must have made. We had left our carriages, and were now advancing in some kind of order. First came bluejackets from the English, French, and Italian ships, struggling to keep their respective flags in line so that one should not by a foot precede the other, then fluttered in the breeze the flags of truce, then came the French and English Consuls —the Frenchman, exceeding short, in silk hat and white gloves, and the Englishman, who stood two feet taller, wearing a deer-stalking cap and a muffler round his neck, and I, who was acting for the moment as secretary to this mission, in virtue of my office wore a black coat and a white solar-topee. Approaching the Velestino railway station, we saw the Field-Marshal's flag flying, and on arrival the consuls were soon granted an interview and were received with much courtesy. He told us that we were only just in time, for if the troops had marched on the town and been fired on, nothing could have withheld them from taking reprisals. The Pasha, however, assured us that Turkey now conducted war in as civilised a manner as any European Power, and he would give us a proclamation from his august

master to read to the few remaining citizens, and he also deputed an aide-de-camp of the Sultan and an escort of cavalry to return with us to the town. The English war correspondents with the Turks, who were on our arrival cooking their early cup of coffee, shared their rations with us, and we then hastened back to the expectant city.

As we took a last look across the Velestino plain before descending the pass, five distinct columns of smoke rose up from the village. The Bashi-Bazouks were at their fiendish work. Yes, we were only just in time to save Volo. As we slowly made our way towards the silent town, the deserted villas and flowering gardens and vineyards lay basking in the morning sun, and we were glad our efforts were crowned with success, for it was a fair city, but to our surprise on the sparkling waters in the bay at our feet we found that the Greek war vessels were still at anchor. This was hardly playing the game. The Admiral had not carried out his promise to withdraw. The officer in command of our cavalry escort at once ordered his Circassians to halt, and wanted to know the meaning of the presence of the war-ships. Were we leading him and his men into a trap? After a rather heated discussion, the Consuls agreed to drive down to the quay and ascertain the reason of the delay. I was left in charge of the bluejackets—in fact, a hostage with the Turks. It was an anxious time, this waiting, for the Turkish cavalry were becoming restless, and Nejib Bey, the Sultan's aide-de-camp, who had been all courtesy, now became a little ruffled and very suspicious. We sat smoking cigarettes trying to look unconcerned, and watching those infernal ships. On the Velestino ridge,

at this seeming treachery of the Greeks, the advance guard of the Turkish infantry had also come to a halt; for at any moment the face of the hill on which we stood might be torn up by shells if the Admiral felt so disposed —I tried to explain to Nejib Bey that there was no reason to expect foul play; that we should be able to proceed; but within myself I only knew for certain this, that the little band of Britishers would have short shrift dealt to them if one ship's gun had opened fire that morning. At last one of our bluejackets reported "Anchors up!" I jumped delightedly to my feet and pointed out to Nejib that the smaller vessel was slowly steaming out of the harbour, and that the larger was under weigh.

"Yes; I think we can go forward now," said he, and after scribbling a message to the Field-Marshal he ordered the advance, and we hurried down to the town. A colleague, in the excitement of the moment, had seized a flag of truce from the bluejackets and proudly waved it to the citizens as we approached. I found the voluminous folds of this flag most useful. The day was excessively hot, and I was perspiring freely. I had lost my handkerchief, and, much to his disgust, I desecrated the white flag of truce by mopping the honest sweat from my brow. I thought I would make a note of it. Probably it was the first time a flag of truce had been used in that manner, though perhaps it had before now relieved the cold sweat of fear from the brows of defeated soldiers.

When we arrived at Volo it took us some time to find a responsible citizen to read to the populace the proclamation of his Most Gracious Majesty the Sultan. At last, from the balcony of the Mayor's house, the

precious document was interpreted—I believe by either a butcher or a baker—to the remaining town folk, ensuring their lives and property if they remained law-abiding citizens and quietly accepted the Turkish occupation.

Three nervous cheers from seven hundred throats were given for the Sultan, and restless, feverish Volo was at peace.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

X.

THE VICISSITUDES OF A WEEK.

I.—THE BANQUET.

With the Russians in 1877—The Czarevitch—A Great Feast—My Provoking Sobriety—"British Drink for the Englishman"—I Succumb—A Sobering Incident.

THE last days of the month of July, 1877, were for me full of adventure. For the fourth week opened with a banquet and closed with probably the bloodiest battle of the campaign, and I was present at both.

When his Imperial Highness the Czarevitch arrived in Biela to take over the command of the army of the river Lom, the generals of its respective brigades gave a grand banquet in his honour, and I happened to be the only correspondent in camp at the time. With their usual courtesy to foreigners, the Russian officers invited me to the feast.

We dined in a large marquee, in the corner of which was a table, *à la russe*, spread with caviare, anchovies, dried herrings, gherkins, and eggs, and that potent spirit, *vodki*, was taken as an appetiser.

On the arrival of the Czarevitch I was presented to him, and he at once courteously took me to the side table, where we ate an egg and drank a glass of *vodki* together. He then bade one of his *aides* who spoke English more fluently than himself, take charge of me. We sat down to dinner, some fifty officers, at a long table in

the centre of the tent, groaning with good cheer. In fact, French cooks had come all the way from Bucharest, loaded with delicacies supplied by the first *restaurateurs* of "the little Paris of the East." The wines were of the choicest brands, and there was also the *vin du pays*, red and white, in large earthenware jars.

We had commenced the meal at the side-board about noon. At three in the afternoon we had arrived at the tea and coffee stage. The sun, with tropical intensity, beat through the single canvas roof of the tent; and what with the high temperature and the heat of the wine within the guests, a rollicking gaiety soon pervaded the whole party. Liqueurs were now served, but as there were no small glasses, *curaçoa* and *kümmel* were handed round in tumblers. Snatches of wild Caucasian and Slav song now burst from the throats of many, and soon an incoherent babble reigned around.

About this period of the feast the Czarevitch thought it wise to retire from the gay and festive board, for many of his officers were fast approaching that state of good-fellowship which sometimes defies discipline. His departure brought sighs of relief from various parts of the marquee, and the babble grew louder and louder. At least three of the guests, who had been dozing in their chairs, now made themselves more comfortable by slipping under the table and falling fast asleep on the sward beneath.

I had not yet arrived at that somnolent stage, for having taken care to drink sparingly, I was yet fairly coherent and consistent in my movements. This unsociable attitude on my part gave evident annoyance to the rest of the company. An old Caucasian general had been looking at me with unmistakeable disgust

for some time, and eventually becoming quite angry at my provoking sobriety he, at last, with a few of his brother officers, conspired to bring about that state of inebriety which prevailed with the majority of the company, and I regret to say that their little plot succeeded. My only excuse is that their success was mainly due to a spirit of patriotism within me, and not entirely to the seductiveness of the liquors.

A Cossack orderly was called in, and a low whisper within the trooper's ear from the aged warrior sent him on his devilish errand.

Presently he returned with a basket. Shouts of approval burst from the little army of conspirators, who had rallied round the aged officer. With many chuckles and uncertain hand the sly old general slowly produced from the basket a half-dozen quarts of Guinness's Dublin Stout!

When the six black bottles stood on the table each conspirator seized one, and flourishing it aloft, shouted:

"Here's British drink for the Englishman!"

I almost turned faint at the prospect of adding this "British drink," as they called it, to the many nationalities that were within me. I looked at the grinning faces of the officers in despair. There was no help for it. The aged chief and his friends were slowly lifting the bumpers of the frothy, gelatinous, tepid—for it had been lying many hours exposed to the sun—fluid to their lips. The officers who had already succumbed to over-indulgence in previous potations were roughly roused from their grassy beds to join in the toast to the English guest. It is the custom of the Muscovite never to take the goblet from his lips till the dregs are reached. This custom I was only too well

acquainted with. Standing up with a ghastly smile, I seized the proffered goblet and lowered its contents till naught but the foam remained.

An escort of four sturdy Cossacks saw myself and the aged general safely to our respective domiciles, and I retired early to rest. The sun was setting as I fell into a deep and unbroken slumber on the soft cushions of an ottoman. It was the darkest hour before dawn when I suddenly awoke from my slumbers with a strong conviction gradually creeping over me of some catastrophe.

An angry voice was loudly anathematizing me. Forbes, who had just ridden in from the Danube—where he had sent off a budget of war news—had stumbled over my body in the centre of the room, had struck a light to see what had happened, and was vigorously shaking me into a sitting posture, inquiring why I had slept in my spurs, and for what reason I preferred the hard floor to the soft pillows of the ottoman.

One, however, does not suffer so much when campaigning from dining "not wisely but too well." There is so much excitement and exercise to work off the ill effects of such indiscretions.

A skirmish shortly after the banquet resulted in an incident in which I was the principal actor, and which, even if I had been more under the influence of the previous night's festivity, would have sobered me just as effectually.

That afternoon we made a slight reconnaissance across the river Lom to find out how strong the enemy might be at that point where we were about to cross in force. We had a battery of field guns, masked in

emplacement on a natural *glacis* of ploughed fields trending towards the river, supported by infantry, while some of our cavalry swam the river with their horses, under cover of the infantry and artillery.

I had advanced with the Russian skirmishing line towards the river when the Russian general, observing a strong body of the enemy's cavalry about working round the flank of our troopers who had just landed, thought he would give our men breathing time to get into fighting trim by attracting the enemy's attention with a few shells from our emplaced guns. The Turks were already engaged with our infantry in a sharp fusillade across the river, at which my pony showed considerable spirit of resentment. I was afraid to dismount and seek cover, for the little beast was dancing and bucking vigorously, and I feared would not allow me to remount him. To add to my discomfiture our shells began to whistle overhead, quickly followed by their flash and explosion on the opposite bank of the river and the sharp blast of their cannon behind us.

My horse stood still, evidently puzzled by the novel situation, when suddenly, without the slightest warning, the animal turned sharply round, got the bit between his teeth, and bolted. I was so taken aback by his quick movement that before I could recover myself I found I was being borne half-way up the *glacis*, and swift as the wind I was carried right into the teeth of the Russian guns. Crash! Crash! Whiz! Whiz! came shell after shell. As I neared the top of the *glacis* I could feel the whirlwind of the projectiles as they clove the air, and the lurid blaze of the guns almost blinded me. I lay as flat as I could along my pony's

neck till the black mud curtains of the emplacement suddenly barred my path, when I rose in my saddle, and the pony giving one bold leap, in another moment we cleared the parapet, scattering the gunners.

Flushed and breathless, I found myself standing by the side of my trembling little horse trying to explain in snatches of Russian, French, German, and English to the general and his staff the reason of my charging the Russians guns—in fact, that the route I returned by was not of my own choosing.

II.—THE BIVOUAC.

En Route to Plevna—Cold Welcome and Short Rations—A Meal at Last—A Franco-Russian.

BARELY two days after these little incidents Forbes and I were on our way to join Baron Krüdner's army marching on Plevna, where the Turks, under Osman Pasha, had lately made so bold a stand that the Russian force had been obliged to retire with considerable loss after a futile attempt to enter the town. It was necessary to leave our cart and stores with our servants behind us, for we could not be hampered with impedimenta of that kind if we desired to be in time for Krüdner's onslaught. We were, therefore, often on short commons, for the villages *en route* had been stripped of everything edible by the advancing army, and we could only find an occasional cake of maize bread and a few eggs to keep us from famishing.

We arrived, sick with hunger, about sunset at the Bulgarian village of Karagac-Burgaski, where Prince Schahofskoy, the general of the left wing of the Russian division, was quartered. So hungry were we that on sighting the colours of the divisional flags in front of a

small Bulgarian hut, I, for one, breathed a prayer of thankfulness for the prospect of a near ending to our weary fasting, for I was younger than my companion and suffered miserably with a ghastly craving for food.

After shaking the dust from our clothes and making a rough toilet, we presented ourselves at the door of the hut and were soon ushered into the compound at the back, where Schahofskoy was seated on a camp-stool talking to two young aides who were standing at the salute in front of him. On seeing us he motioned us to approach, and Forbes at once presented a letter of introduction which the chief of the Emperor's staff had given him. The general took the envelope and looked at us both with an air of sullen tolerance as he broke the seal and read the contents. A grim smile came over his face as he slowly turned the note over with his finger and thumb, and carefully examined the seal.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "it is lucky for you to have brought this note, for I have no alternative but to allow you to remain; otherwise I should have requested you to quit the camp at once."

While he was making this curt and inhospitable speech a Cossack servant was busily engaged in laying a white cloth on a rough table composed of the panels of a door which rested on two empty wine kegs. These proceedings riveted our attention, but as we wistfully glanced with devouring eyes at the articles of food placed on the table the general dispelled any hope we might have had of the prospect of breaking our fast at his board by quietly saying:

"Gentlemen, I am about to dine. Good evening."

We doffed our caps and sorrowfully went on our

way. For an hour we hunted the village for food to appease the ravenous craving within us; but finding none, we at last threw our weary limbs on the straw floor of an unoccupied tent, and, to relieve the pinch of hunger, smoked, till we eventually fell asleep. I dreamed of the Biela banquet, of luscious viands, and of all the delicacies of the season, till I awoke at dawn with a hunger which was simply appalling. Turning over on my side I discovered, within an inch of my nose, a wooden bowl brimful of eggs. I sat up, rubbed my eyes, and shook myself to see if I were really awake. I looked at the precious sight once more, fearing that it might still be only one of the many fantasies of my night's dreams. I stretched forth my hand, clutched the bowl, and finding it real, gave a cry of satisfaction. They were eggs in reality; eight of them, and warm from the pot!

A loud laugh rang through the tent, and a voice cried:

"Now, Villiers, don't be greedy. Leave some for me."

It was Forbes. I discovered that my dear, good friend, in renewing his search for food at dawn, had found the eggs, and with sweet unselfishness had refrained from breaking his fast until he had seen the full effect that the sight of so large and satisfactory a meal would have on his half-starved companion.

After our frugal repast, we started with the army on its final march towards Plevna, tramping along bad roads and through deeply furrowed fields till late in the afternoon, when we came to a halt at our camping ground.

The staff tents were pitched in a stubbled maize

field, and one of the officers, who was attached to the division as aide-de-camp of the Czar, came up to us. We must have still looked hungry, for he said:

"You have not had much meat to-day, I know; therefore, if this poor fare is of any service to you, take it with pleasure."

He then produced from his trousers pocket a lump of dried meat and a large onion.

"Later on, when the cooks set to work, come into my tent and have some bouillon."

We heartily thanked him, and we also found his word good for the soup.

During the evening it began to rain, making the field in which we were camped a perfect quagmire. About midnight a Jew sutler arrived, and we procured from him some raw sausage and a pint of spirit. With these rations we felt well supplied for any emergency till Plevna was captured.

When the *reveille* sounded, as it had ceased raining, I lifted the fly of my tent to look at the morning, and I saw a quaint figure standing out against the sky. It was a tall, eccentric-looking man, in pink silk pyjamas, with a monocle in his left eye, who was slowly stirring a steaming glass of tea with a silver spoon. He was gingerly standing with bare feet on a small mat of wet straw which his servant had collected from the stubble around, to prevent his master from soiling his feet with the thick clayey mud which oozed about him. He continued stirring his tea until his monocled eye glanced on me, when he good-naturedly handed me the cup.

"Take it! Take it!" he drawled. "There's plenty more, my friend," and his servant, who was

tending a steaming samovar a few yards away, at once brought another glass.

"Well," said my newly-made acquaintance, stretching himself and yawning, and turning his glass eye on the quagmire around him, "this is beastly. Why did I ever leave Paris to come to this infernal hole?"

As I gazed at him in some surprise he lit a cigarette, and continued:

"You see, my dear sir, though I am a Russian I am almost a Frenchman. Lived in Paris nearly all my life, and this sort of thing"—looking over the cheerless fields and waving his hand—"is beastly. *Absolument!*"

"Why did I leave France? you would say. Well, you see, patriotism was the prime incentive. I left the army when I was only sous-lieutenant, and having resided in the gay capital ever since, I felt bound to do something for my country when in distress, and here I am attached as an extra nothing in particular to Schahofskoy's staff, and find that all my friends of my early military career are either dead or full-blown generals, and the latter when I see them no doubt think I am very much in the way. For I have no special duty, and, in fact, why am I here? God only knows."

He then dropped his eyeglass, gave a deep sigh, and swallowed his tea. The Parisian-Russian and I became great friends, and we saw a good deal of each other during this memorable day. The morning broke chilly. The dense mist still clung to the soddened ground. So dense was it that on joining Schahofskoy's staff one of his aides-de-camp turned to me and said:

"This is excellent! For foggy weather is one good omen for Russians."

I remembered a certain grey morning I had read about at Inkerman, and should like to have known whether the Russians were of the same opinion then. But I said nothing.

We had not proceeded far on the march before a low "Boom!" trembled through the fog.

"Ha, *mon cher* Villiers!" said my friend with the monocle, who had at that moment trotted up to me. "Listen! now ze ball is about to open—listen!"

I looked at him with rather a grim smile. The pane still coldly glittered in his left eye. I thought of his silk pyjamas, his silver tea-set, and the many Parisian fal-lals which found a place in his tent, and came to the conclusion that my soldier of the boulevards had evidently not yet seen how the shells could waltz around.

"It's a lively dance—a veritable 'dance of death,' I can assure you," thought I.

III.—THE BATTLE.

The Order to Advance—Forbes' Advice—A Pause in the Fight—The Russians are Repulsed—The Remnant of a Regiment—Osman the Indolent—My Death.

BOOM! boom! went the guns through the fog, like muffled drums. Presently we came up with our brigade. The troops were deploying in columns of double companies—with a rifle company in front of each battalion—behind a ridge known as the Radeshova Heights, from the little village of that name which nestled at its base.

The fog, which had retarded a general movement, was now lifting, and the grey battalions of Schahofskoy's command began to strip themselves of their overcoats and prepare for the fray.

At last from flank to flank the order to advance rang out, and the men slowly moved over the crest. Then I knew for the first time that our artillery was on that ridge, for several guns suddenly opened fire to cover the infantry as they threaded their way through the scrub and lay down on the face of the descent beyond. The Turks from the Plevna batteries observing this movement began dropping shells on the slope and ridge.

As the general, following the infantry with his staff, rode through Radeshova village, a shell skimmed the crest and burst a few yards from us. So near was it, and no casualty taking place, I thought I would pick up a segment as a souvenir, and dismounted to do so. When I took the piece in my hand the metal was so hot that I was compelled to drop it in a puddle to cool.

On seeing me do this Schahofskoy and one or two of his staff laughed, the general muttering something about "the eccentricities of the English."

As we rode on to the ridge, the last shroud of mist lying over the landscape seemed to suddenly melt away. The sky was bright and clear, and the sun's rays soon dried our damp clothes and drove the chill from our bodies. The panorama from the ridge was a succession of short valleys, red with an early harvest of Indian corn. Wet with the recent rain the maize sheafs gleamed like stacks of gold against the purple of the hills, and mingled with the green foliage in the brilliant sunlight.

Behind the scant cover of the corn-stacks—which at intervals intersected the Radeshova ridge—were dismounted Cossacks and their horses. In our immediate front was our artillery, and then came the reverse slope of the ridge—on which our infantry were lying *perdu*—shelving down into the valley of the Vid.

But before I could take in further details of our position, whiz! whiz! came two shells, bursting in front and rear of us. At least five had torn large furrows in the soil before the general gave the order to dismount and seek cover. The staff led their horses to a thicket on the reverse slope. I was to take my horse there, and I dismounted with considerable alacrity, for the situation was becoming serious; but when I attempted to lead my pony to the thicket, he stood stock still. With starting eyes and ears cocked he appeared to be listening to the music of the shells as they whistled round about us. They seemed to explode and blaze wherever I turned; the air was rent with the sharp blast of their report. We were the only living objects on the ridge, and the Turks were making better practice every minute, but still my pony would not budge an inch. I looked round in despair; I could see the faces of the members of Schahofskoy's staff grimly smiling—from their cover—at my dilemma. My friend Forbes, who had also succeeded in gaining the thicket, shouted:

"Leave your horse, and come away!"

I could never make out why I did not follow my friend's advice; probably I thought how valuable the animal might be in a retreat if he showed so much reluctance in advancing. Anyway, I stuck to the little brute, and to soothe his nerves I kept patting his neck, till at last I succeeded in turning his tail towards the Turkish gunners; then softly rubbing his nose, I attempted to lead him, and to my joyful surprise he slowly followed me to a corn-stack, behind which two Cossacks, who had been anxiously watching my little adventure, now rushed out from their cover and embraced me in true Russian fashion—with a kiss on

each cheek—so delighted they seemed to be at my miraculous escape.

By this time the guns on both sides gradually ceased their thunder, and soon an ominous silence reigned. Wondering at the quietude, I left my horse in the hands of one of the friendly Cossacks, crept back over the ridge, and rejoined my friend Forbes.

This is what I saw from the thicket—I jotted the details down at the time on the side of one of my sketch-books. Before us opened the wide valley of the Vid; the stream from which it is named, a narrow band of blue, occasionally flashed in the sunlight from out some gentle undulations as it lazily wormed its way through the valley. On our right hand was the Gravitza ridge, on the highest point of which stood a large redoubt. Below this ridge and crossing the valley were a series of strong earthworks and redoubts, crowning the waves of undulating country rolling towards the town of Plevna, which was so soon to become famous to the civilised world. The red tiles of the houses and the metal-topped minarets of its white mosques were easily discernible nestling behind the formidable works of the Moslems, which bristled from every mound and every point of vantage given by the slightest irregularity of the ground.

Even Krüdener's batteries, semicircling the great Gravitza, hushed their distant growling. Both Turks and Russians paused in their bloody duel, and seemed breathlessly awaiting some untoward event.

From the direction of the town over the Loftscha road, passing close under the Turkish advance works on our extreme left, a troop of scattered horses tore at hard gallop towards us, concentrating as they neared, and

drawing sharp volleys from the Turkish skirmishers. Cheers from our men lying nursing the scrub went out to the wild-looking band of Russian Circassians as they ran the gauntlet of the Turkish fire. In another moment the dare-devil troopers swept like a slant of wind up our slope, and, gaining the ridge, passed Schahofskoy, who was now returning the salute of their commander. As their leader recovered his sword and galloped past I saw that it was young General Skobeleff. He had just returned from a reckless reconnaisance right into the very jaws of Plevna. Shot at from the roofs and windows of every house in the main street of the town into which he boldly penetrated, he had safely come back with most valuable information, with but few slight casualties.

The cannon on both sides still held their breath. When would this extraordinary silence be broken? thought I. We were not kept waiting long.

From among the little group of officers by whom the general was standing several saluted him and suddenly galloped away. One dashed down the slope and wound his way through the infantry as they lazily stretched themselves in the sun. Soon the whole hill-side became alive with bristling bayonets as the men sprung up to the word, "Forward!"

In another moment the Russian infantry trudged down the slope and over the stubbled fields, spreading out as they advanced till their lines stretched right across the valley of the Vid. When half-way between our ridge and the first line of Turkish trenches a little puff of smoke floated upward from the field, followed by a sharp crack of a rifle. Thus was opened one of the most memorable battles of the century.

Now in quick succession puffs of smoke shot up, followed by the sharp crackle of musketry as the Russian troops steadily advanced. Then from left and right flanks our artillery thundered once more, and shrapnel hailed its deadly splinters on to Turkish trenches. But as yet there was no response from the grim and silent lines of earthworks which the Russians were, with unwavered lines, approaching.

Suddenly short puffs of smoke leaped up from the fringe of the Turkish works, which quickly rilled their trenches in one long flame. Our artillery increased its thunder, and with deadly precision hurled shell after shell into the enemy's position. But still unbroken the long yellow flame played, like sunshine on the ocean's ripple, along the parapet of the works.

Soon the valley became hazy with smoke as the Russian infantry passed within the zone of the Turkish fire. Only the bright flashes from the thousands of moving rifles told us how the advance was going on.

Presently from out the stifling fog came limping men with torn and bloody clothes, many without their caps, and not a few without their rifles. Some dropped fainting by the way, others unsteadily struggled back to the Radeshova slope. Here and there were little groups of men carrying maimed comrades. Up over our ridge came straggling one of these groups; two soldiers, slightly hurt, were carrying a less fortunate comrade, who groaned from out the folds of a blanket fixed stretcher-wise across their rifles.

"Here—quick! Pass the word for the doctor!"

A dark liquid slowly dripped from the saturated blanket, and marked a bloody trail down to the village behind the ridge, where the doctors had placed the first

ambulance. The blood-red track grew wider and ruddier every moment as the gruesome burdens were borne to the ambulance. The trail was so closely followed by other bearers that a muddy path was soon made, which could easily be traced across the valley.

Wave after wave of Russians steadily fed the straggling front, and, breaking with the terrible hail from the trenches, sowed the field with little heaps of dead and dying. As nearer and nearer crept the black-and-white dots—for the men were wearing their dark green tunics and white trousers—towards the trenches they seemed to split up into small groups, and soon in their front blue flashes of light gleamed for a moment as their officers waved their swords and shouted to the men to close, and they for a time hesitatingly hovered, like hornets uncertain where to place their sting. Presently a small number of the more reckless rushed the first work, then half yell, half cheer was wafted across the valley as the rest of the advance dashed on. The foremost immediately bit the dust, but in spite of the deadly fire belching from the parapet the remainder still madly pushed forward.

On these few men the whole field seemed to rally, as a rush was made to swell the bristling torrent which was now surging up over the redoubt. We could see the sun flash for a moment on the bayonets of the men as they were brought to the charge. Then the carnage of close quarters began to dull the steel, and a confused babel of yells and curses came up from the valley.

The staff at this time were standing near Forbes, who was seated on a stone busily scribbling his notes of the fight in a pocket-book.

"Villiers," said he, "we shall dine in Plevna to-night."

"Yes, certainly," said my Parisian-Russian friend, who was standing near supplementing his monocle with a binocular; "we shall sup in Plevna to-night. Look at that, *mon cher* Villiers! See how our brave fellows use ze steel. We are very good, we Russians, at ze bayonet. Here, take my binocular—you will see better."

It was a glass with convertible lenses marked marine, field, and opera. I happened to have turned it to the latter. My friend pointed out my mistake, and with a deep sigh said:

"Ah! That lens reminds me of the last time I looked through it at ze *grand Opéra de Paris*."

Pong! Burr-r-r-r! And a shell split into segments a few yards from us. My friend yawned and continued:

"Surely you remember ze *saison* of 1876, and ze *belle première danseuse*, eh?"

Cr-r-ash! came another shell. Still with perfect calmness he went on:

"I mean ze *petite brunette* wiz ze *nez retroussé*. Well!"

A few yards in our rear a shower of mud was dashed up as a shell ploughed the field. A clod of earth caught my friend in the small of his back, bringing him to his knees.

As he regained his feet he quietly readjusted his eyeglass, and shaking the muddy soil from his clothes he alternately rubbed the place where he had been hit and angrily shook his fist towards the Turkish guns. When his ire allowed him to express his disgust by word of mouth he cried:

"*Mon cher* Villiers! These Turkish *canaille* are zo

barbarious; they have not ze sympathy. Such is war —so vulgare!"

The general was near us, scanning the field through his glass, and a smile of satisfaction was spreading over his face, for a battery of our guns had followed the infantry into the redoubt and was now playing havoc with the Turks, who were retiring towards the town.

For a moment the capture of Plevna seemed a *fait accompli;* but such is the fortune of war that a few minutes later the tide turned, and the coveted goal was snatched from our grasp.

The town which, peeping above the Turkish trenches, mocked us with its mosque and minarets was not to fall into the hands of the Russians before one hundred and forty days had been spent in terrible fighting, and not until its fair fields had been drenched with the life-blood of the flower of the Russian army and some seventy thousand human beings.

The storm had swept on for a moment, the thunder of the guns become a distant rumble, and a strange, weird silence lingered for a space over the field of battle. The Russian stretcher-bearers had brought all the maimed living off the field. The thousand of little black-and-white dots studding the furrows and ruts of the heavy soil — who but a few minutes ago were so busy in their life and vigour, dealing death everywhere—were now mere clods, waiting to be returned to Mother Earth.

A sudden slackening of the fight in Krüdener's direction made me wonder if we should really dine in Plevna that night. His guns slowly boomed in a half-hearted way, and the rattle of his infantry was like the pulse of a dying man, fitful and weak. But still

Schahofskoy seemed sanguine, and many thought that the square meal in Plevna that night was assured. For the first time in the day Forbes and I broke our fast, and I lit my pipe.

Presently, from out the captured redoubt, an orderly rode in hot haste in our direction, and hurried up to the general. Schahofskoy appeared much disturbed at the news he brought, frowned, and spoke rapidly to the members of his staff. The orderly remounted and returned; he had hardly gained the newly taken trenches when another horseman cleared the parapet of the redoubt, and madly galloped towards us.

The face of the mounted man was pale, his forehead, scarred by a passing bullet, was covered with beads of perspiration. The blood from his wound mingled with the sweat that trickled down his cheek. As he dismounted a more ominous-looking messenger could not well be. He was almost breathless and quivering with excitement.

The general impatiently listened to his story. Then, stamping his foot and clenching his hands in a delirium of passion, Schahofskoy addressed his officers.

I touched my friend Forbes, who was still at work on his despatches, and said:

"Look at the general. Surely there's something up —some serious news."

"Oh, nonsense!" replied he. "It's all right."

"There is something up," I still persisted. "Look at that!"

From the lately captured redoubt the Russian batteries suddenly returned. The horses, clearing the curtains at a bound, dashed down into the trenches, then struggled up again, still with the guns intact, while

the drivers lashed furiously at their steaming flanks as they madly careered across the valley.

"Hang it, Forbes! What does this mean? Look at that!"

My comrade sprang to his feet, and seizing me by the arm whispered:

"By Jove, Villiers, you're right! There is something up—the whole game's up!"

For the Russian success depended entirely on capturing and holding that position. It was the last throw of the dice.

"Krüdener's held in check, and our reserves have all gone forward."

Even as Forbes was speaking the Russian infantry came clambering over the works in the wake of the guns and raced across the battle-ground. It seemed but a moment after that the Turkish shells shrieked through the air and burst among the retreating masses. Up and over the ridge of Radeshova came the Russian infantry in panic-stricken flight—a mere rabble, all making for the road along which we had advanced but a few hours previously in such good spirits, and so confident of success. Even now the Turks, strongly reinforced, were occupying all their old positions, and blazing away at us with renewed vigour.

Krüdener had not been making headway at all finding the Turks in the Gravitza position too strong for him, and now the disaster befalling his left wing made his defeat complete.

The wounded had been collecting all day long in the little village we had passed through in the early morning. I therefore said to Forbes:

"I will go and look after the safety of the wounded, as I can do nothing here."

Leaving my comrade with the general and his staff, I started on my errand. As I rode down to Radeshova several hundred panic-stricken soldiers came tearing over the ridge like a tidal wave, carrying everything before them. Many, to impede their movements the less, had rid themselves of their overcoats and accoutrements. Some had thrown away their rifles, and not a few had stripped themselves to their shirts.

A number of bandsmen were among this crowd, and several had cast aside their more cumbersome instruments. A kettledrum was sticking in the mud. The brass rim lying uppermost caught the flare of a bursting shell. The lurid flash, catching my horse's eye, caused the brute to begin prancing about, evidently more scared at this, to him, singular object than the hurry-scurry and din of battle around him.

This incident was fatal to my plans of succouring the Radeshova wounded, for in the twinkling of an eye my pony was nearly swept off his feet, and he and I were caught up in the current of the retreat before we had gained the outskirts of the village, and tossed about as in a stormy sea. With the greatest difficulty I strove to keep the little beast under me from being impaled on the bayonets of the reckless soldiery as they stumbled over the deeply rutted fields in the gloom of the coming night.

In spite of darkness rapidly closing in upon us, the flicker of Turkish fire did not diminish, but came nearer and nearer as the hordes of Moslem irregulars

hurried on the heels of the retreat, slaying all the weak or wounded that came within their clutches. As they carried on their ghastly work, their exultant yells and the heart-rending shrieks of their tortured victims came up from the valley.

At last I was swept with the torrent of helpless fugitives towards a thicket flanking the road to Karagac-Burgaski. Hurrying through the wood was an officer; following him were about forty men, all bloody and ragged. They were still under discipline and moving in fairly good order. The officer on sighting me ordered his men to halt, and out of sheer weariness the majority threw themselves on the ground. He then asked me the direction of the Burgaski road, and in an agitated voice, broken with pity and anger, said:

"Look, monsieur, look! Here are all the men that remain out of one of the Czar's finest regiments, and I am their only officer."

I pointed to the blaze of bursting shrapnel a few hundred yards on our left flank.

"The Turks are showing us the road. There it lies, evidently," said I.

Our line of retreat was for many miles ploughed by the enemy's shells. I eventually came upon the main road, and found it crowded with panic-stricken soldiers. An ambulance waggon and five country carts were slowly lumbering along, brimming over with wounded; and on either side of the waggons were crowds of maimed men who had hopelessly struggled to get places within, and were now clinging to the wheels and tail-boards of the heavily laden vehicles. Many were struck down by their more fortunate companions

within the carts when too great a number clung to the wheels and impeded their progress.

I found only fourteen able-bodied men with this contingent, and they were trying to save the groaning and whimpering occupants of the waggons by skirmishing within a decent radius to scare the over-bold Bashi Bazouks who were following us, slaying all the wounded that came in their way. Toward midnight the Turkish fire ceased, and these jackals of the Turkish army, glutted with the blood of their helpless victims, at last slunk back to their lines, and we moved along in peace till early dawn, when we discovered between us and the village of Bulgarini a party of Circassians.

We sent out a reconnoitring party and prepared to die protecting our charge, when to our joy the scouts came galloping back, bringing in one of the party, who turned out to be of our cavalry. Their uniforms were exactly like Turkish Circassians but for the distinguishing badge of a white cross worn on their Astrachan shakos, which in the mist of the early morning we were unable to distinguish. On arriving at the village we requisitioned all the straw from the barns and thatch of the houses, and placed our wounded on the litter, standing guard round them till the sun was up, when we found the safety of our position for a time assured. I had foraged around for food, and was able to procure a large cake of maize bread, some of which I ate, and the remainder I stuck on the pommel of my saddle.

Seeing Schahofskoy and a few of his staff riding toward the village, I rode up to my friend of the previous morning who remarked so flippantly that "ze ball was about to open." As I neared the party they all seemed terribly dejected, and I thought how much the sad group

resembled Meissonier's picture of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. I offered my friend with the eyeglass (which, by-the-bye, was still fixed in its accustomed place) the cake of maize. He sadly shook his head and said:

"I have no appetite."

I then proffered it to the other members of the staff. They all answered:

"We cannot eat."

I now inquired if they had seen Forbes.

Not since the previous night, they replied.

I became terribly anxious about him, for to all my inquiries the same ominous answer came:

"Not since last night."

With a heavy heart I turned my little horse's head toward the Danube, for I must now hurry off my budget of war sketches.

Toward midday, I came up with the head of the retreating army. Crashing and jamming over the little bridge spanning the river Osma, crowding the valley beyond, and further filtering through the passes cutting the belt of hills running parallel to the Danube, was the remnant of that force of 30,000 men that but a brief four-and-twenty hours previously had advanced with such high hope, and had fought so heroically for their country's honour. My heart went out to them in sympathy for their misfortune, for Russian soldiers are stolid, brave fellows, and I had witnessed their heroism, their endurance, and humiliation.

In a state of utter confusion were ambulances, baggage waggons, artillery, and men of all arms. A surgeon who knew me struggled out of the crush, and riding up to me, said:

"Did you ever see anything like this? Osman Pasha is one big fool. Why he not come on? He would cut us up in one hour."

The famous though rather indolent Pasha was sitting, no doubt, smoking his pipe, satisfied with his victory and did not come down upon us, to the astonishment of many beside my surgeon friend; for Osman had a splendid opportunity at this moment of driving us into the Danube.

The Russian forces eventually rallied and intrenched themselves. I kept on my journey to Sistova, arriving there late at night. I gave my poor, fagged-out horse three rations of grain, and I soon fell asleep on the flags of the courtyard of the inn—for I could get no shelter—to the sound of my horse crunching his corn, as he stood near me, his bridle secured to my wrist. Once or twice I was awakened by a gentle tug at my arm, and the sound of the corn-munching still went on. Poor brute! he would not risk lying down, for he seemed to know there was further hard work for him in the morning. At dawn I gave him a drink of water down by the river, and we crossed the bridge to Simnitza, thence to Giurgevo, to catch the evening train for Bucharest.

There was nothing to disturb our equanimity *en route* till we came within a mile of Giurgevo. I was skirting the bank of the river. On my left, inland, was a wide and deep ditch, one side of the trench being in deep shadow, cast by the low light of the setting sun. The dark gap appeared weird and uncanny to my horse, the animal becoming excessively restive, snorting and shying at the quaint shadows. It was the custom of the Turks in Rustchuk, on the opposite shore, about this time in the afternoon to open fire on the Bucharest

train being made up in the Giurgevo station. Out of pure devilry the Moslems brought one of their guns to bear on the solitary rider struggling with his horse along the river side, apparently trying to catch the train, my polite Turkish friends evidently not recognising at that moment, and at that distance, the distinguished visitor they had treated with so much courtesy a few months back, when my Levantine dragoman took me up to see their fort. However, their shots were badly aimed; though they burst on the road and in the ditch, they only cured my horse of shying. Seeing at once the old, old situation, the animal bolted the rest of the way, bringing me on time at the station, where I left the brute in charge of a Cossack.

At about nine o'clock I arrived in Bucharest, the Little Paris of the East. Unwashed for three days, plastered with impalpable dust, the uppers of my boots almost worn through my riding breeches, stiff in every bone from recent exposure and continued riding in the same saddle, I staggered out of my calèche into the pretty little garden of Brofft's hotel.

As I dragged myself wearily over the gravel, to my delight and great surprise I discovered my lost friend Forbes; by his side were W. Beatty Kingston, of the *Daily Telegraph*, and the English Consul, sitting dining at a table under the trees. On slowly approaching the little party Forbes turned round and uttered a short exclamation of surprise, and then, with the others, stared at me with a peculiar look I shall never forget. I was suddenly arrested by this curious expression on their faces, and stood transfixed. Forbes, still with his eyes dilated, fixed on me, rose from the table and walked with an incredulous gait toward me. When he came

within a yard he suddenly gave a shout of satisfaction and grasped me by the shoulder, shaking me all the while. Then the other men came forward and clutched at me. Not quite understanding this novel proceeding on the part of Forbes and my friends, I quietly said:

"For goodness' sake, give me something to eat and drink. I am starving."

Forbes shook me all the more at this remark, saying:

"That's Villiers for certain, and alive too. You ungrateful youngster! Here have we been mourning you as killed at Plevna, and now, overjoyed at finding that you are not an apparition, the only return you make for all this anxiety on our part is to immediately question our hospitality by asking for something to eat and drink. Pass the wine! By Jove, he does look rather faint."

I certainly felt in that condition. I was so dead beat that when I got to my room that night I fell on the bed without undressing. Toward noon next day I found myself awake, between the sheets, in my *robe-de-nuit*. How I was undressed and tucked up on that occasion remains a mystery to me. I was totally oblivious to any kind offices till the waiter came in with my coffee.

Forbes, I found, had on that unfortunate night at Plevna given me up for lost, as all the wounded in Radeshova had been massacred by Bashi Bazouks a short time after I had left him for the purpose of looking after the ambulance. I always ascribe my safety on that occasion to the regimental drum sticking in the mud.

Colonel Wellesley, our military attaché, who had

left for England, kindly acceded to a request from Forbes to break the news of my death to my mother. This unpleasant duty he found unnecessary before he reached London, as a wire notified the fact of my safety to him at Strasburg.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

XI.

THE DEATH TRAMP OF THE TURKISH PRISONERS.

Great Wars and Cruel Winters — A Memorable Sleigh-ride — A Terrible Sight—Our Russian Host—A Dandy with a Heart—Prison and Pestilence—A Reluctant Angel.

A BATTLE-FIELD is a scene sad enough after the heat and excitement of the fray is over, but the saddest sight I think I have ever witnessed during my campaigning career was the march of the Turkish prisoners, in the winter of 1877–78, through Roumania to their captivity in Russia, after their long, stubborn defence of the Plevna position. Not one-third of those brave men, who for so many months had held the huge masses of Russian soldiers at bay, ever returned to their native land.

When war has devastated towns, wrecked homes, and laid the land bare by invading hosts, Nature seems to revel in the misery of her sons, and launches upon them the cruellest winter or the most scorching, waterless summer, as the case may be. Great wars are curiously marked by phenomenally bitter winters. For instance, the winter of 1877–8, as regards the bitterness of its weather, vied with the winter of 1870–71, when France and Germany were at war. In this, probably, cruellest winter Roumania had known for years, I travelled from Fratesti—the terminus of the rail from Bucharest—down towards the Danube. Dr. Humphrey Sandwith, C.B., who had been with General Fenwick

Williams during the siege of Kars in 1855–56, was my companion. He was engaged in distributing money collected by one of the many philanthropic societies in England for the alleviation of the distressed sick and wounded of the war, both Russians and Turks.

We were stowed away with our furs in our sleigh—a sort of hencoop minus the top bars, with our baggage in the straw to serve as a seat. The mercury had fallen to some 15° below zero the night before, and our road, therefore, was too slippery to be the most desirable surface for sleighing. The result was that our conveyance would occasionally, to our consternation, run away with the horses whenever we came to a slant to left or right of the road, causing us to be always on the look out for a collision with one of the many unsavoury heaps of carrion by the roadside, on which hungry dogs were feeding. Dead horses and dying oxen now strewed our route, signs that we must be in the wake of some munition train. Presently we came up with a long line of waggons and sleighs, loaded with shot and shell.

The morning was bitterly cold. Before us lay a vast plain of snow, only broken by the bleak telegraph poles, which for miles traced our road through many a drift. The dead stillness of the plain under its white mantle was occasionally disturbed by the dull beating of the wings of carrion crows as the foul birds hovered over their prey. Soon they increased in number, making almost black the leaden sky. Then, afar off, breaking the horizon, a long dark line came slowly moving in caterpillar fashion over the snow towards us. It was a column of men, marching. No Russian or Roumanian troops constituted it, or ere this we

should have heard some cheerful song borne over the plain. I aroused Sandwith, who had settled down in his furs and had fallen fast asleep.

"Look! what do you make of those fellows?" said I. "Surely they must be Turkish prisoners. See the plumes of their Dorobantz guard waving as they advance."

"Yes," cried Sandwith, now thoroughly aroused and peering through his binocular. "I can see along with the escort Turkish officers, some on ponies, others on foot."

Behind the officers tramped the men who had so long kept the Muscovites at bay round Plevna. How spiritless and broken they now looked as they trudged wearily along the road to their captivity! Half-starved, almost dead with fatigue and the cruel cold, many with fever burning in their eyes, mere stalking bones and foul rags, came the brave troops who had made the fame of Osman Pasha.

Sandwith, with the keen scent of the medical practitioner, sniffed the taint of smallpox and typhus lingering around them in the frosty air.

"For our lives, Villiers, we must get to windward of these poor fellows!" and we drove our sleigh to the left flank of the approaching column.

Many of these wretched creatures were even now falling out of the ranks and lying down to die. One had just thrown himself in the snow by the roadside; he could go no further. A comrade, loth to leave him, followed and tried to persuade him to struggle once more to join the line. There was no answer; he had swooned or was dead. The ghastly line of living phantoms was trudging wearily forward. A soldier of

THE DEATH TRAMP OF THE TURKISH PRISONERS.

the rear-guard now came up. With the butt-end of his musket he roughly pushed the living man back into the ranks; then with a brutal kick turned the head of the fallen Turk over in the snow. A wild, fixed stare met his gaze. The Turk was dead. The soldier hastily shouldered his rifle and rejoined the guard.

Thousands and thousands of birds of prey whirled around, settling in front or rear of this sad procession, like sharks round a doomed ship. A few yards further on, lying half covered with snow, was the nude body of a dead Turk, who had been stripped by his companions for the sake of the little warmth of the fœtid rags he had worn on his gaunt limbs. A carrion crow had just settled on his clenched hand, and the dogs were hurrying up to their loathsome repast.

Another man lay with upturned face staring on the heavens through the slowly falling snow. He was not quite dead, although the flakes lodged on his fixed eyeballs. Dogs and swine from the village near by were quarrelling for their share of the ghastly feast.

In this village, called Putineiu, we found a large lazaret had been formed by the Russians. A considerable number of the Red Cross attendants lived in the houses of the village. In one large building which had once been a school-house resided a Russian nobleman, who was the chief of the ambulance. Hearing of our arrival, he kindly invited us to stay a day or two. We gladly accepted the prince's hospitality, for we knew there was scant comfort at Turnu-Magurelle, the little Danube town for which we were making. The ice was still on the move on the river, and no

communication with the opposite shore of the Danube could be made till the floes had packed. Here, while we waited, there was certainly comfort, if not luxury.

We slept in one common room, in which a German stove burnt night and day, and we fed on biscuit and canned goods, generally with Russian tea for a beverage. There was plenty of tobacco in the shape of cigarettes, probably the finest the world could produce. Princely hospitality must crop up somewhere, even in humble quarters, and it came out strong in those cigarettes.

Our Russian host would say, as he whiffed at his jewelled amber mouthpiece:

"Pah! One cannot eat sucking pig and caviare when these poor devils are starving"—alluding to the Turkish prisoners arriving daily—"but one can smoke and be not ashamed, and this tobacco is priceless."

A curious character was our host—good-hearted, sympathetic, and full of sincere commiseration for the terrible suffering around. He would come in after his morning duties in billeting the prisoners and shout for Carlos to come and fumigate him. He would strip by the stove, and while his servant sprayed him with Violette de Parme he would sponge his beard in a kerosine tin, which served as a basin, and comb his hair in a jewelled mirror, which came from his gold and turquoise dressing-case—a glittering souvenir of the favour of his august sovereign, the Czar. This he never travelled without, and it was a token of the luxurious side of his character, which, he would always tell you, he strove hard to hide from the misery around him. Nevertheless, he was to be seen everywhere administering to the wants of the starving, frost-bitten sufferers, in rich sables and with gold-mounted stick.

The prisoners were passing through Putineiu in thousands daily, and during the night were billeted on the inhabitants—who were almost as poverty-stricken as their guests—choking up their little hovels and breeding vermin and pestilence wherever they went. Mothers must protect their young ones from contagion, so when night set in, those Turks too weak to resist were thrown out into the cold, which meant certain death, for the thermometer registered far below zero. The result was that the little dead-house opposite our lodgment was always well tenanted the following morning with stark and frozen Turks.

Sandwith and I visited this charnel house. In one of the rooms we found a few poor creatures who had sought helter from the bitterness of the night. They had cleared a space in the centre of the room by piling the dead around, and with scraps of rags from the bodies and some straw were seated shoulder to shoulder round this fœtid fuel, trying to ignite it with flint and steel. At last it smoked and smouldered.

One wretched Turk we had reckoned as dead crawled toward the weird group, and feebly struggling for a place near the burning rags was thrown back by his luckier comrades on to the pile of dead. We remonstrated against this rough treatment, but his companions in misery sullenly replied:

"Why should we waste warmth on him? He will be dead in a few minutes."

Sandwith, who spoke Turkish fluently, insisted on the poor fellow being allowed to huddle in with the rest round the cheerless fire. The Turk we had befriended could not speak his thanks for palsy, which had just seized him. Big tears stood in his eyes and rolled down

his frost-bitten cheeks as he crawled up to the doctor, and out of gratitude kissed his boots.

Many of these shuddering wrecks of humanity had not eaten for days, save of the carrion by the road-side. We were lingering, loth to go, but knowing not what to do to alleviate their misery. We had money, gold in plenty; but of what use was gold when there was nothing to buy? A gleam of sunshine sometimes pierced the ghastly gloom of the place, when the little Russian Red Cross sister presented herself, smiling, at the door, in white cap, black waterproof apron, with a flaming red cross on her breast. I had met her before, and had many arguments with her. She hated the horrible, bloodthirsty Turks, and for that the English too, for their sympathy with those barbarians, as she was pleased to call them; yet she tolerated me, and we were the best of friends.

"Here you are again," she said, "still interested in these miserable creatures. Ugh! I loathe them!" But at the same time she swiftly passed round the group huddled by the fire, and in another moment the majority were smoking cigarettes, and some were trying to kiss her feet in the fervour of their happiness.

I have seen that little lady, though always railing at the horrible Turk, go into the most foul fever dens to administer comfort to the miserable prisoners. She was the life and soul of the lazaret at Putineiu, and many a Turk, with his eyes glazing in death, would turn to her sweet face and try to utter a blessing on her for her devotion to the sick and dying.

Every morning the pure white snow in and around the village was blotted with the stark corpses of prisoners, who had dropped by the way. Then the local

arabas went round and the dead were collected, thrown in pell-mell, till the carts seemed crowded with bones and rags. The stiffened limbs, catching between the spokes of the wheels, snapped and creaked in concert with the crazy vehicle as they were carried to the empty granaries near by, which were used as burial pits.

The last day I spent in Puteneiu was probably the coldest of this exceptionally cold winter. The telegraph wires running along the roadside were encased in more than an inch of frost. The hospital glittered a ruby tint with frosted ice and snow in the last rays of the blood-red sun, sinking below the horizon. At this moment I called at the hut of my friend the Red Cross sister to say good-bye. She had just returned from some act of mercy in the lazarette. As we stood on the threshold I drew her attention to the lovely evening. A star and crescent moon were now the only signs in the clear sky. My companion turned, touched my arm, and pointed over the plain. Ah! there was the long black line winding over the snow. More Turkish prisoners! When was all this misery to end? On they tramped, footsore and weary, with their cadaverous faces and ice-laden beards. Some trudged along on their heels, their toes having sloughed away in the biting frost; many were half-naked, the rotted rags having dropped from their limbs, showing great pale patches of frost-bitten flesh.

The sister and I walked together towards the wooden bridge spanning the narrow ice-bound river. Here the long black line came to a halt, and a ration of bread was served out to each prisoner of war. Some dropped the bread, their hands too stiffened with frost to hold it, and then there was a free fight among

their more ravenous and stronger brethren for the dropped morsel, till the guard with the butt-end of their rifles restored order. Some strove to moisten the food in the puddles thawed by the warmth of their bodies, while others knelt in the snow, turning their weary heads towards the east and fervently praying after their fashion.

I looked at the sister; she was trembling with emotion. Tears stood in her eyes.

"Ah!" she said, as she wished me good-bye. "I begin to love these wretched Turks. This misery atones for their many sins. God help them, for how little we can do!"

I walked away and lit one of the prince's cigarettes. As the fragrant smoke curled into the frosty air I could not refrain from thinking that the little lady with the black apron and flaming cross on her breast was one of God's helping hands, and a very sweet one too.

XII.

FACT AND FANCY.

The Mudir of Dongola—A Glowing Picture—"Curly" Hutton—A Quaint Fleet—And a Quaint March—The Mudir as I Found Him.

WHAT contributed more than anything else to my resolve to share the fortunes of the British Army in the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1884 was an article which I read in one of the daily papers. In it was a description of the palace of the Mudir of Dongola.

The Oriental splendour depicted in the account written by the author of this article was not excelled even by the best story from the "Arabian Nights." The Mudir, according to it, was the Oriental potentate of one's boyhood's conception, attired in turban and Turkish trousers, with scimitar by his side. His throne was a Turkish carpet of rare beauty, on which he lounged, supported by soft cushions of Broussa silk; Damascene lamps, burning fragrant oil, hung from the lofty Moorish ceiling and diffused soft light on the swarthy faces of his courtiers who prostrated themselves before their ruler. A screen of the finest Masharabeyeh or lattice work, divided the divan from the Harem, and soft laughter, low beating of the tom-tom and the scraping of a stringed instrument—resembling the fiddle in its worst mood—told the Western visitor that the stern-featured Mudir had a soft place somewhere beside the cushion of Broussa silk on which he was seated.

This was more or less the tone of the article I read, and I resolved that I must see that Mudir and, if possible, have a peep into his Harem.

There must also have been a spirit of adventure about this daring correspondent, for no person was allowed outside the British outposts; so he must have given the sentries the slip and have crossed a weary stretch of desert, and have suffered much hardship for many days before reaching his goal. Like the Frenchman — M. Olivier Pain — who had already snapped his fingers at the British authorities and had plunged into the sandy waste for the purpose of joining the Mahdi, I read that article over and over again, and longed to follow in the author's footsteps. At last the order from my paper to join Wolseley's expedition came and I hurried to Cairo. A few hours in the city of lattice-work, and I made my way to Asiout. Here I found that Lord Wolseley was about leaving the next morning by steamer for Wady Halfa. I waited up all night. When, at an early hour, the General's train arrived at Asiout, I asked permission to join his party. This was speedily granted, and in an hour I was steaming up the Nile in the direction of Dongola. What a charming journey that was! We took in all the wonderful temples during the day, and when we anchored at night, were entertained in quaint Arab fashion by the elders of the nearest village. The lilac sunset, the yellow moonlight, the stars hanging like clusters of gems in mid-air, so clear was the atmosphere—and then the ruddy dawn. The chocolate brown waters reflecting the cobalt blue sky, the sand dunes, the palm trees, the quaint mud villages with their blue-gowned

inhabitants, all made the voyage delightfully interesting and picturesque. At last the first Cataract was reached and Philæ was visited while our steamer braved the rapids and arrived safely in calm waters beyond the wondrous island.

Then we were once more aboard, steaming up the Nile to Korosko, where poor Gordon abandoned his last touch with the outer world and pressed on into the desert for Abu Hamed, Berber, and Khartoum, never to return. Wady Halfa reached, the General came to a halt for a time, waiting for the whale-boats which had been made in England. And here the Camel Corps was formed. Camels were bought, and Tommy Atkins made his acquaintance with the ship of the desert. Tommy took to the awkward beast with great good-will, and a fine serviceable force the Camel Corps became, thanks to the energy of that smart British officer who went under the sobriquet of "Curly" Hutton, now Major-General Sir Edward Hutton, K.C.B., A.D.C., commander-in-chief of the forces of the Australian Commonwealth. I met him the other day in Cape Town, and he hardly looked a year older than when, one memorable morning fourteen years ago, I sketched him capturing one of the enemy's guns in the trenches of Tel-el-Kebir.

When the boats at last arrived they were collected and portaged round the second cataract, and an advance on Dongola by land and water was made. What a quaint fleet that was as it stood out in full sail from the Saras *levee*—the Camel Corps cheering from the shore as the Canadian *voyageurs* steered their English brethren safely past the porphyry rocks, which looked like huge black teeth in the dead white sand on either

side of the narrow pass that enters the Saras basin. I bought a camel at Wady Halfa, and made my way with the "D" Company of the Camel Corps. What a strangely quaint march that was under the blazing sun! We slouched along at about two miles an hour through short deserts, always gaining the Nile by nightfall. Some of us who could not stand the glare of the sun would keep our eyes fixed on the ground watching the numerous trails, wondering by their imprint what beast or reptile had left its mark on the yielding sand. Others would watch the shadows of the camels gradually shortening till the sun told us that midday was nigh, when we would halt for our rations of canned beef, biscuit, and water. Then, after an hour's rest, we would move forward till four o'clock, when we would settle down on the bank of the Nile for the night. While the rations were cooking we would take pot-shots at the crocodiles, which lashed the waters furiously with their tails when a bullet struck a crevice in their armour. Many a cartridge was thrown away on a snag of wood or jagged rock sticking above the water—so keen was our belief that everything in the Nile was a crocodile till it was proved otherwise.

When at nightfall we rolled ourselves up in our blankets and courted slumber, a light breeze would freshen the air, skimming the desert of its lighter particles of sand, imperceptibly covering us with an impalpable powder which awoke, almost choking us with its suffocating dryness and blinding us with the drift. When the *reveille* sounded, we might have been samples of the great majority arising from their graves, so completely had we been imbedded in the

sand. Soon the banks of the Nile assumed a greener aspect. The cultivated fringe widened as we entered the fertile Wady of the province of Dongola, and presently, on the west bank, was visible the city, the goal for which I had longed and to attain which I had endured considerable hardships.

The City of Oriental splendour was an utter delusion. Surely this straggling town of squalid mud-and-plaster houses and half-ruined mosques with their tottering minarets, could not be the beautiful Dongola I had read about? In spite of this cruel disappointment I was still hopeful; the splendour of the Mudirie might only be hidden like a Kimberley diamond in its original setting of blue clay. With beating heart I crossed by the ferry, and soon found myself in the streets of Dongola, which turned out to be narrow, tortuous lanes winding through labyrinths of mud walls.

I was billeted in a house of baked mud with Harry Pearse, one of my brother correspondents. He had brought with him a brand new saddle and bridle, which he hung on a wooden peg in the wall of our room. Scorpions, centipedes, ants, and other loathsome insects were running, crawling, and meandering about the earthen floor. So we stood the legs of our charpoy, or native bedstead, in milk or jampots filled with water and strove to sleep the sleep of the unmolested just. There was a scramble round the tins all night, but no insect was bold enough to swim the depths of the cans. In the morning I woke up and discovered Pearse's saddle still hanging on the wall but minus the stirrup leathers. The stirrup irons, it was true, were glistening in the sun, now streaming into

the room, but apparently they were hanging by nothing visible. I awakened my comrade and pointed to this phenomenon. He jumped out of bed and examined the saddle. In another moment he was cursing, in vigorous English, ants, black, white, and red. The stirrup-leathers had been encrusted in the wall and eaten by white ants in less than six hours. As he touched them they broke away from their mud crust like pieces of charred paper. We found that the ants had nibbled at everything in the shape of leather. Our saddle-bags, revolver cases, portmanteaux, valise straps, had been scoured over and over. All that we could do was to congratulate ourselves on our personal safety. But for those jam-pots we might have lost leather too.

A hasty breakfast, and I was ready for the glories of the Mudirie. A native pointed out my road, and I made my way to the palace.

As I entered the compound, it flashed on me in a moment that the special correspondent of the London daily could never have been there at all. I mounted the steps of the white-washed, mud-walled building, and was motioned by one of the attendants to wait a while. The Mudir was about to receive his officers, or sandjacks, in *durbar*. My heart sank within me. I mournfully realised that I had been utterly deceived by the brilliant imagination of a Fleet Street Special.

This is what I saw. In a white-washed square hall, opening on to a balcony, was the Mudir, just seated, not on any Turkish carpet, but cross-legged on a Vienna bent-wood chair. By his side was another chair, across the cane bottom of which was a dervish sword, pen,

ink, and sand, and the seal of office. At the back of him stood a servant swaying to and fro a bamboo to keep the numerous tame sparrows from settling on his chair.

His costume was the simple black frock Stambouli coat, a fez with small turban, trousers rather short for his legs, and red morocco slippers. Above him, from the mud ceiling, hung no Damascene lamp with oil of rare fragrance, but a two-and-sixpenny opaque glass kerosene lamp, which exuded a strong smell of paraffin. After paying my respects I entered the reception room. There was no Oriental splendour here! A cabbage-rose-pattern Brussels carpet partly covered the floor. A divan, draped with cheap French damask, occupied three sides of this dingy apartment. A table in the centre wore a red baize cover. Standing against a column supporting a fly-blown whitewashed ceiling was a tall French clock with flower-painted face—the bells of which chimed the wrong time with uncertain vigour. I left the Mudirie sad and dejected, but on lighting my pipe and reflecting for a while, I came to the conclusion that, after all, probably the Fleet Street Special's description was much more pleasing and satisfactory to the unthinking public. People at home naturally look for something Oriental from the East and they got it, laid on with generous brush.

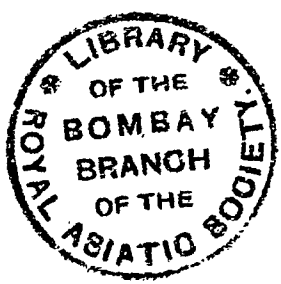
Two years after this little incident I was at a public dinner in London when the author of the Dongola article was introduced to me. I looked at his interesting face, said I had longed to meet him, expressed enthusiasm for his work, and told him how much impressed I had been with that description of

his visit to the Mudir of Dongola. He beamed with satisfaction; in fact, he was rather pleased with that article himself.

"Yes," said I; "it impressed me so much—so very much, that I resolved to——"

"Pwhat?" said he, falling back in his chair.

"Go there myself," I slowly continued, "and what is more, my friend, *I have been.*"


LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

XIII.

A BRUSH WITH OSMAN DIGNA.

A Quick Journey—Bennet Burleigh Looks Ahead—The Advance on El Teb—The Last of Some Old Friends—The Battle—Colonel Burnaby — His Political "Platform" — The Arab Retreat—Baker Pasha and the 10th Hussars—A Curious Incident—Major Cholmondeley Turner—Rum and Asparagus.

ONE of the quickest journeys I have ever made to reach the seat of war on behalf of my journal was from London to Trinkitat. On the news reaching England of the ignominious defeat of Egyptian troops under Baker Pasha in the Eastern Soudan, the paper I represented was as vacillating in its policy as the British Government was apt to be in those days when dealing with the Egyptian difficulty, and deferred sending me out to the Soudan till the English troops were actually moving on the enemy. The result was that I nearly missed the first fight of that campaign. *En route* to Brindisi, I met Bennet Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph*.

We were literally in the same boat regarding time. Burleigh, with his characteristic forethought, finding how close a shave our arriving "on time" would be by ordinary travel, cabled from Brindisi to the canal authorities at Port Said asking them to place one of their steam launches at our service. As our good old P. and O. ship the *Tanjore* steamed into Port Said, the little canal boat was ready for us, and came puffing and

blowing alongside. My colleague and I hastily gathered up our campaigning gear—which, by-the-bye, was not much, Burleigh's being exceptionally light, for I believe he took little more with him on this occasion than a piece of carbolic soap and a tooth-brush—and jumped into the boat; and before the *Tanjore* anchored to take in coal, we were well on our way through the canal.

On nearing Lake Timsah a rain-storm burst upon us, but in spite of our little craft being continually driven out of her course by the violence of the wind, and occasionally sticking fast in a sand-bank, the dawn found us outside Suez, and before the sun was well up we had managed to get a passage on board the transport *Northumbria*, and an hour later we were on our voyage to Suakim.

This good luck was followed by even better luck. On entering the harbour at Suakim the *Northumbria* was signalled to make direct for Trinkitat, the immediate base of the present operations, and the afternoon of the following day found us landing on its beach. We discovered that the British advance had already moved off; and the next morning the whole force followed in the direction of El Teb. To my disgust I found that there were no horses to be bought, and no servants to be found. My only chance of seeing any fighting was to trudge on foot beside Tommy Atkins, which I did, and, like that warrior, carried my kit on my back.

The whole British force, under General Sir Gerald Grahame, which had set out from the coast that morning for the relief of Tokar, had to wade through a belt of liquid mud and sand.

A tropical rain, though the fall was only for an hour or two, had deluged the usually marshy plain of Trinkitat and converted it into a veritable slough, for as much water falls on the Red Sea littoral in that time as in a week of steady downpour in an European climate.

Splash, splash, through the mud, sometimes over the ankles and occasionally up to the knees. Splash, splash, more and more in the mire.

"Reeves, when is this blooming fun going to end?" said one Tommy Atkins to another.

"As soon as yer think yer on terry-firmy yer off ag'in into the slush. 'Eavens! we only wants to meet the fuzzy-wuzzy, and snipe shooting wouldn't be in it."

These two soldiers, with about a hundred others, had placed their socks in their boots and had slung the latter articles round their necks. Their trousers were tucked up over the knees, and many had slung their rifles across their backs to give their hands more freedom in actively assisting the progress of the commissariat waggons, when the deep ruts in the ooze of the track caused the carts to sink up to their creaking axles.

Afar off on the desert where the water had subsided —for the light no longer glinted—was the advance-guard of the British army in bivouac on a dry sandy stretch outside a mud fence-work, called Fort Baker. The men dribbled into the bivouac, puffed, blown, and weary, after the strain of the toil across the belt of mud. To add to their discomfort, no sooner were the fires burning briskly, kettles boiling, and the chill gradually thawing out of their weary limbs, than heavy clouds gathered, and another downpour deluged every-

thing, putting the fires out as quickly as an extinguisher on a burning rushlight. We were all drenched and lay soaking till morning. However, the hot sun of the Soudan, within an hour after he had shot up from the horizon, scorched up every sign of moisture, and again imparted suppleness to our stiffened joints.

With the dawn the General's pacific envoy, who had left the night before with a message of warning to the enemy to disperse and not obstruct our advance, had returned with the proverbial "flea in his ear."

The Arabs meant fighting. At eight a.m., the simple breakfast having been eaten, the order "Stand to!" was given, the arms were unpiled, and our little army was formed up in oblong square, and the "advance" was sounded.

The cavalry, consisting of the 10th and 19th Hussars, moved slowly forward on the left flank of the square. As I was not mounted, I thought I should stand a better chance of seeing the fighting if I were outside the formations, since directly firing commenced the force would be enveloped in smoke. I therefore followed in rear of the cavalry. As the 10th Hussars moved off to their position an officer rode up to me and called out:

"Do you remember when we last met in the Khyber?" (My friend was Captain Slade, of the 10th.) "Look me up after the fight; we'll have a chat over old times." And he laughingly rode away.

I never spoke to him again. His life's blood was dyeing the colourless sand of the desert before the sun was down that day. He fell in trying to save a comrade, Lieutenant Probyn, who had been dismounted, and alone was trying to hold three of the

enemy at bay. This gallant action was just like poor Slade, always generous and self-sacrificing.

An hour's march brought us in touch with the enemy, who opened fire on our left at long range. Presently, from the direction of the coast, the shriek of shells became audible, and I observed *H.M.S. Sphinx*, from the Trinkitat roadstead, trying to cover our left flank by shelling the enemy; but the range was too great, and the result was as little damaging to the Arabs as was their rifle fire directed on us. In fact, the shells from the *Sphinx* much inconvenienced our own cavalry, and one projectile burst so close that our troopers were obliged to scatter for a time.

Marching, as if on an Aldershot field day, over trying, undulating, sandy country, the square moved briskly to the weird screech of the bagpipes, taking no heed of the desultory shots of the enemy, who gradually retired as our men pressed forward towards the village of El Teb. The square was soon to me a simple blot on the desert. Sometimes, indeed, a depression in the ground completely hid it from my view, and at last I had to depend on the screel and hum of the bagpipes for guidance.

It was only about ten o'clock in the morning, but the heat was intense, and at times the atmosphere quite stifling. Presently the air became charged with an odour that was sour and sickening in the extreme. In another moment I nearly stumbled over a dried-up corpse. It was a mere mummy. The skin and flesh had shrunk to the bones. A few yards further on I came across several dead fellaheen, shrivelled to parchment with the dry atmosphere of the desert. These

bodies, it was plain to me, marked the route of Baker's disastrous retreat, for they all faced in the direction of the coast line towards Trinkitat, and were lying on their stomachs exposing gaping spear wounds just below the shoulder blades. Each had been given the *coup-de-grâce*—a slit across the throat—by their Hadendowah foes, but I was hardly prepared for the ghastly sight which shortly presented itself. There were no vultures in the air or slinking beasts of prey to give me warning, only the sickening, sour odour of dried human flesh. Suddenly I stood on the verge of a slight depression in the desert, and in the hollow in my immediate front lay hundreds of glistening bodies—for they were all stripped of their clothing—their glassy skins shimmering in the fierce sun. A little in advance of a group of shreds and tatters of dried flesh and grinning skulls lay two corpses, paler in colour than the rest. The taller of the two I recognised by the colour of his beard and clean cut features to be my old friend and companion in Bulgaria, Dr. Armand Leslie. The other body was that of Maurice Bey who, with young Forrestier Walker, had stubbornly stuck to their posts and heroically died. Walker I could not recognise. Poor boy! I remember him after the Tel-el-Kebir campaign in '82 kicking his heels in Cairo, harassing the Government for employment. While waiting for something to turn up he would occasionally amuse us with drawing caricatures of himself and his future adventures in the service of the Khedive. In one of these sketches he predicted his appointment to the Gypp artillery, winning his spurs in a brush with the Arabs, being decorated for his services, and finally, captured by the enemy, he was taken home by a Hadendowah to his family on the end

of a spear. I little thought how soon that burlesque would end in a veritable tragedy.

Handsome Armand Leslie was my friend and companion in many a trying situation. Some seven years previously we had nearly met our death together when in Bulgaria in a most inglorious way—by the poisoned fumes of a charcoal brazier. He had been saved then only to survive for this end; and where was the glory, even now?

A chill seemed to pierce me through and through in that ghastly sour valley of the dead—a chill that even the scorching, blasting heat of the noon-day sun could not dispel. I was for a short time spellbound with the gloom and horror of my surroundings, when the sound of distant cannon aroused me. Our work had begun, and we were now about to avenge the deaths of those heroic Englishmen and that sad remnant of Baker Pasha's army which lay rotting on the desert. I hastened in the direction of the square.

As I gained the crest of the reeking hollow, I found that a shell had just burst in the rear of our square, then another exploded in front, tumbling over several of our men. Up till now we had kept steadily moving in the direction of El Teb, without firing a shot. When within about a thousand yards of the Arab position we came to a halt and opened with our screw-guns. So well aimed was their fire that they seemed at once to cause the enemy's musketry to slacken.

The bugles sounded the advance and our men stepped forward, steadily firing at the Arab sharpshooters, who quickly sought cover behind their entrenchments and a large mud fort in front of the village. In another moment our advance face

became entangled in a veritable hornets' nest of the enemy. From out of innumerable pits, as intricate as those of a rabbit warren, black fuzzy heads popped up, then the muzzle of a rifle gleamed for a moment in the sunlight, there was a puff of smoke, then the whiz of a bullet, and the head disappeared.

No wonder, when the order was given to charge the trenches, the front face of our square lagged a little, for the occupant of each pit had to be dealt with, and many who had assumed death became troublesome customers to those of us who were too eager to reach our objective, bounding out of their pits and charging us with their spears and knives.

From the embrasure of the mud fort a Krupp field-piece occasionally belched a yellow flame and a shell shrieked its way over our heads to find a billet in the desert beyond. Looming through the smoke a gaunt figure suddenly appeared on the parapet, with terai hat on head silhouetted against the grey cloud from the cannon.

"See! there's Burnaby, sir," said a man who was limping with a hole in his sock and a bit of good flesh torn away. "Ain't he a-givin' them beans?"

The gallant Colonel certainly seemed to be doing remarkable execution among the Arabs with his shot gun. Three natives protecting the Krupp rushed at him, but he calmly plugged into them with his left and right. The first charge of buck-shot at close quarters knocked the one clean off his feet; the other two, staggering with the sting of the pellets, were subsequently bayoneted by some of the Highlanders following closely on Burnaby's heels. Before the captured field-gun had fairly recoiled from its last discharge at us,

Major Turner of the Marines was repeating an operation which he also performed at Tel-el-Kebir, by blazing away at the retreating enemy with the shot and shell they had left behind them.

Burnaby was a remarkable character, full of strange ideas, but always sane regarding actual execution.

I was lunching with him and a friend in the Temple only a few days before he left England for the Soudan. As he was not going out in any official capacity my friend asked him why he was so anxious to go. He laughingly replied:

"For a very good reason. I am about to run for Parliament in the Conservative interest, and I have discovered that there is nothing like the adventures of war to talk of to my constituents; so I am going to pick up material with which to interest them."

This conversation I was forcibly reminded of when, a few months afterwards, we were all back from the Soudan, I happened to read in a Midland newspaper Burnaby's speech to his constituents. There was a touch of grim humour in it in reference to the recent campaign. This was the gist of the address: "The widows and orphans of the Arabs who had so heroically fallen in the defence of their country were wringing their hands and tearing their hair, cursing the name of Mr. ——" the British Liberal Minister who was responsible for the war. And yet poor Burnaby himself made many a widow and orphan that day, "sniping the niggers"—in the language of the soldiers—whenever they showed their heads.

The hero of the Ride to Khiva, in spite of his eccentricities, was a lovable creature, and while

campaigning endeared all by his wonderful pluck and good fellowship. In the night marching across the Bayuda desert, during the Nile expedition for the relief of Gordon the following year, his hulking figure was seen everywhere, quietly keeping the column in order. He seemed to be in his element when there was hard and dangerous work to do. I never saw him look gloomier than during that march, for he had a presentiment of his coming end. Yet there was always a grim touch of humour about him. One night I asked him what he thought of our chances of reaching Khartoum in time to save Gordon.

"The odds are about twenty to one," he replied, and added, "We Britishers are curious people. Why, do you know, I've been made commandant of Metemneh, and we haven't got there yet."

Poor fellow! he never came within sight of his command, for he fell in our first fight with the enemy in the gorge of Abu Klea. Burnaby was a thorough Bohemian, and somewhat a slovenly dresser, seemingly bearing a considerable animus to collars, for he generally wore a muffler and never appeared so happy as when he was away from the influence of barbers.

Though the Arabs were beaten, there was little running away about their retreat. When they were followed too closely, they turned and fought again. Of course, in ordinary tactics, it was time for cavalry to be at work; and the 10th and 19th Hussars were ordered to charge the broken enemy. I happened to be standing by a mounted officer in Egyptian uniform. Two keen grey eyes sparkled with excitement from between the bloody folds of a towel which had been hastily bandaged round his head, as they

eagerly followed the movements of the cavalry. I turned to him asking if he were seriously hurt, and found the wounded man to be Baker Pasha, whom I had known in Turkey. On expressing my regret for his mishap he took my hand, and, pressing it, said:

"No, I am not seriously hurt; but just look," and, for a moment, tears seemed to stand in his eyes, as his hand trembled in mine.

"Look! Look at my old regiment charging!"

The troopers of the 10th, their swords gleaming in the sun from out the whirling eddy of dust, were bearing down on to the scattered bodies of retreating Arabs.

"That's it! Let them have it. See how the boys go through the——"

Here he was rather incoherent, and his wound began to bleed afresh. Not heeding the ruddy drops rapidly pattering down his dusty tunic, he still held my hand, and when the *mêlée* was at its height he squeezed it as if he were firmly gripping a weapon.

Backward and forward the cavalry charged, but still the enemy were not flurried; they stood their ground and gave battle, and some rolled under the horses' bellies, cutting and slashing with their two-handed swords, ham-stringing several animals and bringing their riders to the ground. Those who bit the dust never rose again. In this *mêlée* poor Slade and Probyn met their fate.

Lancers would have done more execution with an enemy of this description. The sabres of the Hussars were not long enough to give the Arabs a quietus, as they threw themselves under the horses. At last, out of sheer weariness, the enemy made off, and the field

was left to the British troops. The scene after the fight was ghastly enough, especially round a square brick building, which we found was intended for a boiler-house. With great surprise, we looked upon this curious relic of Western civilisation in this savage spot. Near it an old iron boiler lay rusting on the desert—one of the follies of Ismail Pasha in the course of his efforts to open up the Soudan and establish all kinds of industries in the Egyptian territory.

Civilisation had gone to the wall since the days when that now dilapidated boiler was in useful service. Round the emblem of a peaceful industry, barbarity in its cruellest mood was seen. The old iron cylinder had been used for a breastwork, and here the Arabs had made a bold stand. Bodies were heaped up on one side of it till no more cover was afforded; but on the top of the pile was a lad doubled up, his head between his legs. I was preparing to sketch the weird group.

Two soldiers were picking up some spears and shields when suddenly the lad I was sketching sprang up into the air, and flourishing a broad knife bounded at us. At first I was bewildered by the sudden onslaught, but soon finding that I was not dreaming and that the boy meant mischief, I beat a hasty retreat until I was able to draw my revolver. The two soldiers seized their rifles and followed my example. The boy at times came so close on our heels that we could hear the rush of the knife in the air as he cut at and missed us.

Just as I felt the warm flush of his breath on my neck, my companion on my right turned and shot the lad dead before I could pull trigger, and he fell a quivering mass at my feet. He was still clenching the knife—a

short blade, twisted like a corkscrew. The fanatical glare was still in his eyes, the peculiar cry when an Arab strikes seemed yet lingering on his parted lips. It was a piteous thing to be compelled to kill so brave a lad. I was glad that his death did not fall to my lot. It was always the saddest phase of Arab fighting that no quarter could either be given or taken.

After this little incident of the boiler, I was for safety's sake obliged to cover with my revolver every apparently-dead body I came across. We bivouacked on the battle-field that night with the dead and the dying for our companions.

When the stars came out and the heavy breathing of the slumbering soldiers and low whimperings of the wounded broke the stillness of the night, one sorrowing little voice was distinctly heard above the snore of the sleeping soldiers—the bleatings of a kid that had lost its mother and was now closely embraced in the arms of a stalwart Highlander, who had fallen asleep with the little animal in his arms.

Before sundown, Major Cholmondeley Turner, of the Egyptian army, had pluckily volunteered to return to Fort Baker for rum rations for the men. It was a hazardous service, for no one was safe when without the British lines. Turner was now overdue, and we were becoming rather anxious about him. Towards midnight a large fire was lighted as a beacon to guide the belated convoy into camp. My overcoat was so saturated with rain during the previous night that I was compelled to leave it at Fort Baker. A heavy dew fell over the desert, which chilled me through and through. I could not lie down, for the ground was as

wet as sand between the tides, so I kept pacing by the glowing embers of the beacon. Hungry and weary I was, for I had not tasted food since early morning, and by this time I was miserable enough. I was loth to ask any of the officers for food, since they had only short rations themselves; but I thought I might make an appeal to Major Turner, for I had been of some service to him during the day in keeping his water convoy from stampeding during the fight.

Presently the grousing of camels stole over the plain, and soon the gurgle of the liquor barrels was distinctly heard, and a ghostly file of Baggles glided past the fire. On seeing me, Turner at once offered me a tot of rum. I was about to ask him for something to eat, but my nerve failed me. The spirit gave me courage. I soon hit upon a plan of delicately approaching him on the matter. I had a number of excellent cigars with me. I handed him one, for which he seemed most grateful. He immediately lit it with a burning ember from the fire, and passed the stick to me.

"No, thanks," said I.

"Don't you smoke?"

"Oh, yes," I replied; "but not now; I should be ill. I have not eaten since dawn."

"Great Scott!" he cried, "that's twenty-four hours ago. You must be starving. Here, boy, bring my saddle-bag." After probing its depths, he laughingly said, "I have not much to offer you—only a tin of French asparagus. Let us share it."

I found that rum and asparagus were not bad things in a way, even if taken together; but, in spite of Turner's hospitality, I also discovered that short

rations and a damp desert do not go so well together.

I was down with fever next morning, and was taken back to the coast on the tail-board of an ambulance cart.

XIV.

SKOBELEFF'S CHARGER.

The Russians at San Stefano—The Great MacGahan—A Visit to Skobeleff—Skobeleff and the Turks—His Affection for MacGahan—What Makes Men Fight?—Bad News of MacGahan—I Ride to Constantinople on Skobeleff's Charger—MacGahan's Death.

In the winter of '78 the Russian Army had moved up on to the ridge of Tchekmedjie and was looking down on the old Moslem city, just snatched from its grasp by the British squadron which had passed through the Dardanelles into the Sea of Marmora, and was ready at a moment's notice to open fire on the Russians if they moved another yard towards Constantinople. It was a curious sensation for me—the sight of the war-ships flying the ensign of Old England. Indeed, I hardly knew whether there was still within me the patriotic feeling that ought to arise at the sight of the flag "that braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze." For I had shared the vicissitudes of the Russian Army during many a fight and a trying march across the Balkan Peninsula, and I had found the Muscovites, whom the majority of us Englishmen regard as veritable Russian bears, to be good-natured, jolly, kind fellows.

During the long halt of the Russians outside Constantinople I had taken up my quarters in the English club in the Grande Rue de Pera. Here that famous American war-correspondent, the veritable emancipator of Bulgaria, Januarius Aloysius MacGahan, used to join me at dinner. He was nursing the United States military

attaché, Lieutenant F. V. Green, who was suffering from typhoid fever. MacGahan used to turn up rather late for dinner after his assiduous attention on his ailing countryman, and I noticed that his appetite was gradually becoming poorer and poorer, till at last he would eat nothing but a few strawberries, which he amused himself by requisitioning from my plate when the dessert came on. We had both been looking forward to meeting the great Russian general, Skobeleff, who had invited us to stay with him at his camp at Tchekmedjie.

On the morning we were to start MacGahan sent me the message that he was not well enough to come with me then, but would I go and inform Skobeleff that he would be at his headquarters on the following day?

Riding out from Constantinople, I found the Russian commander in his tent, which was pitched on a little hillock in the centre of his army of thirty thousand warriors, "the survivors of the fittest" of that famous Russian legion which had forced the passage of the Danube in the previous June.

The smart and acute Skobeleff had picked up a few ideas from the "unspeakable Turk." I found that the majority of his men had discarded the Krenke and Berdan rifles for a lighter and surer weapon, the Martini-Peabody of the Turkish Redifs.

Skobeleff met me in his temporary dining-room, an arbour of greenery a few paces in front of his little tent. A curious figure the General looked as the leaves fluttered about his clean-shaven head, for he had copied the Mussulman in this respect also, and his cranium was as smooth as a billiard-ball. His big yellow beard seemed to cover the upper part of his tightly buttoned grey

overcoat. His high Russian boots were splashed with mud, for he had just ridden up from San Stefano, the sea-side headquarters of the Grand Duke Nicholas, the Russian Commander-in-chief.

After a hearty welcome he inquired:

"Where is MacGahan?"

I gave him his message, and added that my comrade was rather unwell. A shadow passed over Skobeleff's face as he received this information, and he said, with great concern:

"My dear Villiers, I know MacGahan thoroughly, and I fear that he must be seriously ill not to keep an appointment with me. Ah, what a fine fellow our American friend is! By Jove, don't I remember what a sensation he caused when he arrived in Khiva from that long, lonely ride across the Turkoman desert! I took to his genial, brave face at once, and we have been the best of friends ever since. Well, our party will indeed be a small one. There are only myself and a Frenchman, but we will nevertheless do our best to entertain you."

The General himself was good enough for me, for I was full of that hero-worship which is one of the grandest sensations of youth. And Skobeleff, next to Clive, was my paragon in the way of war and adventure.

His tent was furnished with the utmost plainness. A truckle bed, a table, and a chair made up the complement of his household effects. Three books—those he most prized—were on a little table, a small piece of candle stuck in a tin candle-holder beside them. I looked with interest at the contents of his scanty library. It consisted of "The American War," by Badeau,

Schuyler's "Campaigning on the Oxus," and the "Life and Adventures of Napoleon."

The evening train to San Stefano did not bring MacGahan, and so we were a small party at dinner in the little green arbour that night.

Just as the meal was announced, Skobeleff said to me:

"Here's a little function you might find interesting." And so, taking me with him, we reviewed a body of some twenty company cooks, who were drawn up in line a few paces outside his tent. Each man held in front of him a pannikin of ragout. Said Skobeleff:

"Do as I do, Villiers."

We walked down the line each holding a spoon, tasting the contents of the soup-kettles and pronouncing them good. The cooks then made a left turn and filed off towards the camp.

Skobeleff was very fond of doing these little things. He used to say that "the rations of the men should be good enough for the general."

At the roll call, after a fight, the General would step up to certain men and compliment them on their personal bravery, having, as he would say, "had his eye upon them" during the action. His soldiers all loved him for these little touches of frank comradeship, and they would have marched to the mouth of hell, if Skobeleff led the advance.

That night at dinner we were talking about the Turks, for whom the General had a great admiration, as he loved a brave enemy.

"I wonder," said he as we sat at table, "why those men fight like fiends?"

"It's probably their fanaticism," I replied. "And

after all, it's some inducement to a poor devil who is half-starved, and has very little of the pleasures of this life, to know if he dies killing a Christian he passes into a world where his stomach's always full and his harem contains the most lovely *houris* imaginable."

"Ah!" said Skobeleff. "There's something in that."

"Then," I pointed out, "your men are just as fanatical. They fight for their particular God, the Great White Czar and Holy Russia."

"Yes, that's so," laughed Skobeleff; then, turning to his French guest:

"And you, monsieur, what do you fight for?"

Gesticulating, as some Frenchmen will, he sprang up, posed heroically, and said:

"*Ah, pour la gloire!*"

"Bravo! And now you English?"

"Well! Probably the greatest aspiration of all."

"Vat's dat?" smiled the Frenchman.

"Why! British interests, of course," said I.

Both he and Skobeleff laughed heartily at this.

"Do you know," said Skobeleff, "I love you English. I have never visited your country, but I consider you a wonderful people. I admire you so much I should like to fight you. I want to see the 'red-coat' and come in touch with the 'thin red line.' And," he continued, "we are very likely to be soon at close quarters with it. Now look here, Villiers, if there is war between England and Russia, you come with us. It will be so interesting to you to see the other side of the question."

"This is awfully good of you, General; but you must know that the 'thin red line' you lately alluded

to has never been beaten. What if you should get a thrashing?"

"Have no fear; you will be safe with me. Just think it over—how novel it would be; how international your profession would become. Think it over," laughed Skobeleff. "Good-night."

Before falling asleep I fancied I could see a possible campaign which would have for its fighting ground the plains of Roumania. For at that period the Roumanian Army had resented their threatened disarmament by the Czar, and had retired to the Carpathians ready for any emergency in case the Russians were forced to face Great Britain or Austria in their resolve to obtain Constantinople.

The Russian Army now before the city of the Sultans had eaten bare the country over which it had marched. The roads through the Balkan passes, made almost impassable by the phenomenal severity of the winter, were the only routes through which the Russian supplies filtered for the army. The single line of railway through Roumania, their only direct communication with Russia, was threatened by their late Ally, now a well-disciplined enemy. The Black Sea ports were commanded by the British fleet. The Turks were certainly not yet fully beaten, for volunteers were pouring in daily from Anatolia and were being licked into shape by the renowned Baker. All these conditions made the situation rather an exciting one for Russia.

Next morning there was no news of MacGahan, and Skobeleff wired to Constantinople for information regarding him. The reply was:

"Seriously ill. Unconscious."

The General was excessively concerned by this sombre intelligence.

"Villiers, you must return at once. I am afraid the poor fellow is in a very bad way. This looks like black typhus"—a plague that was raging at that time in Constantinople.

"General, there's no train until the evening."

"That makes no difference," said Skobeleff. "Take my white charger. He is fleet, and if you manage him well you will be in Constantinople in less than three hours."

I was almost staggered with the responsibility of riding the General's charger, the famous horse which had carried him through so many fights. What if anything should happen to the animal? It was therefore with a feeling of pride and at the same time of fear that I mounted. The morning was dull and lowering. The road, soddened with nearly a week of incessant rain, was slippery, and one long slough of mud. But Skobeleff's charger was good enough for any road, however heavy, and away we galloped. The early morning drizzle turned into a downpour of pitiless rain that simply soaked my ulster through and through. This garment was made of homespun, with a dash of the martial aspect thrown into it by a red woollen lining.

When at last I had crossed the dreary streak of treeless, undulating, sterile country between the Russian camp and Constantinople, and arrived in the Moslem city, I took off the bedraggled ulster and placed it across the pommel of my saddle. Winding through a labyrinth of narrow streets I found myself an object of interest alike with Mussulman and Christian wayfarers. Intent on my all-important errand, I paid no attention to

these curious glances; but when I arrived at the door of my club, to my horror and mortification, on looking at the steaming charger, I found that from his withers to his flanks he was stained with the dye of the magenta lining of my ulster. For hours I scrubbed at that horse without avail, and when Skobeleff turned up by the evening train I had to apologise for the still ruddy hue of his famous charger.

Poor MacGahan was dead.

No one was allowed to see his body. Officials were stationed at the door of the room in which his corpse lay to prevent anyone entering, for fear of spreading the contagious malady. But Skobeleff forced his way into the death-chamber, and, kneeling by the bedside, burst into a flood of tears.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

XV.

WRECKED!

From Bayuda to Korti—My "Contrairy" Camel—I Arrive on Foot—Lord Wolseley and the Desert Column—*En Voyage* for Dongola—We are Wrecked—My Sensations—I am Saved by Soudanese.

THE first Nile campaign was practically over for the time. I had tramped the last few miles of my weary journey across the Bayuda to Korti on foot; in fact, I was obliged to do so, for my wretched camel had broken down when just within sight of the green fringe of the Nile, and the only resource left to me was to trudge the last lap through the heavy sand of the desert. Camels are curious animals, and occasionally they are extremely irritating. A horse, when nearing his destination after a long, tiresome journey, will prick up his ears, brace himself generally, put on a spurt, and try to come up to time. With a camel it is otherwise—anyway, it was so with mine. Directly he sighted the glorious streak of silver with its verdant fringe, he began to slow down and seemed absolutely indifferent to the restorative properties of the water that danced and sparkled in the distance. Yet he had not been watered for five days! The more I exerted myself to hasten him forward the more the beast seemed to lag, and at last I had to use the raw hide whip with as much vigour as my weariness permitted. Under this punishment the animal simply stood still and slowly moved his head round in my direction, showed his teeth, and plainly

meant mischief. A camel has a long neck and a long reach with it. When his head came up on my right hand, with his teeth all eager, and "grousing" to his heart's content, I found it advantageous to slide down the left bank of his hump and so dexterously get out of reach. Finding that I was too nimble for his fiendish purpose, he at last dropped on his knees, settled himself comfortably in the sand, gave a grunt of satisfaction, and flatly declined to move a step further. I therefore left him with my baggage on the desert (for he was a "baggle," or baggage camel, an animal as inferior to a trotting camel as a donkey to a racehorse), and tramped on foot into our encampment at Korti.

On reporting myself at headquarters Lord Wolseley was good enough to ask me to dine with him. I found that the General's hair had grown much whiter since our little force of some two thousand warriors mounted on camels, made the final dash across the Bayuda desert, with the aim—alas! futile—of rescuing Gordon. Some attributed the whitened locks of the Commander-in-Chief to the anxiety caused by absence of tidings from the Desert Column. After a certain date, when no news from us began to create uneasiness at headquarters, Wolseley would ride out alone every afternoon to a commanding knoll on the outskirts of the desert and gaze through his glass across the arid stretches for some sign of the gallant little army that seemed to have been swallowed up in that sea of burning sand.

The anxiety was over now, but Gordon was lost, and the campaign, though admirably carried out with great earnestness, was a fruitless one, having been doomed almost from the outset by a dilatory and irresolute ministry.

How well I remember, a few days after my arrival in camp, hearing Lord Wolseley addressing some of the native chiefs who had befriended us on our advance up the Nile, telling them that it was the intention of Queen Victoria's government to avenge the death of Gordon, and that if it took a period of years the power of the Mahdi would be crushed! The natives were drawn up under the acacia trees, the doves in the branches cooed in the cool shade of the foliage, and the chiefs and their followers smiled and salaamed.

A fortnight later, by order of the same vacillating ministry, the army was ordered to evacuate the Soudan and to return. Wolseley's assurances were repudiated, and the loyal chiefs and their followers were left by us to the tender mercies of the Mahdi and his fanatical, bloodthirsty crowd.

The General was pleased to inform me that I might as well take a rest, since we should certainly not again advance for some months to come. A fresh base of operations was to be chosen, and the British army, while awaiting reinforcements, would for a time remain wholly on the defensive.

About this time a Khedivial paddle-steamer was about to leave Korti for Dongola with wounded, so I took passage by her. My "baggle" had ultimately sauntered into camp about three days after my arrival. My baggage was intact when the brute presented himself, in good condition, after his rest. So well did he look, in spite of the bullet received in the fight at Gubat and still in his neck, that I was able to sell him for eleven lira. As I gave only fifteen for him at the beginning of the campaign, I considered that I had done pretty well out of him.

When I think of that camel, though I loathed the beast while I was on his back, there still remains in me a vague sentiment of gratitude towards him, for he carried me safely through all the vicissitudes of that trying campaign and, though wounded in my service, he was never on the sick list and generally ready to work.

I spent a happy time steaming down the Nile once more, enjoying the sheen of the water in pleasant contrast to the dead white of the sand, and the steady motion of the river paddle-boat instead of the erratic movements of the ship of the desert. The comfort, too, of stretching one's legs under the proverbial mahogany, when one had been for weeks cramped up by the side of a camel-saddle or commissariat-box, was almost indescribable. I shall hardly forget my first meal in the saloon of the good ship; not so much the actual food or the proficiency of the ship's *chef*—for Chicago canned beef, hard tack and jam were still the prominent dishes in our menu—but the pleasures of a cushioned seat, a, comparatively, clean cloth, and a sparkling glass. The luxury of "The Savoy" or "Delmonico" seemed satisfactorily embodied in the simple saloon of this puffing old stern-wheeler, snorting up the Nile.

We had a number of sick and wounded on the upper deck and a few Greek merchants and sutlers. One of the wounded was Captain Poe, of the Marines, who was the last man hit during the attack on Metemneh. Poe and St. Leger Herbert were the only two men in the force who happened to wear red tunics. Herbert was shot dead by my side while talking to me at Gubat.

Poe lay on the deck on an angareeb, a native bed-

stead, with raw hide laced over it. He was in a very bad way, poor fellow, for his right leg had been amputated close up to the hip. I kept by his side a good deal and did my best to keep the flies and mosquitoes from irritating his arms and face as he lay, pale, wan and almost inanimate, on his rough bed. At night, when the rising moon sent trembling slants of light across the waters, and settled for a moment on his pinched, pallid features, Doré's famous picture of Tennyson's "Passing of Arthur" recurred to my memory, and I wondered if Poe was about to pass away.

It was on the morning of the second day, when we were nearing Debbeh, that the charm of this Nile passage seemed for a time to fade from most of us. The man at the wheel, who was also our pilot, was an evil-eyed, cross-grained, fanatical-looking Arab—a man whom in some parts of this wicked world one would feel inclined to shoot on sight to make the earth cleaner. Ophthalmia in his early childhood had destroyed the sight of his left eye, dulling it to the opaqueness of that of a boiled mackerel. This accentuated the brilliancy of his right, which seemed to mirror every touch of light from the sky and the waters, mingling them into one evil, malignant glare. Directly I set eyes on this fellow I thought there would be trouble. It came.

One morning, about seven bells, we were steaming merrily through the placid waters between low sand-hills about a mile apart, near a reach where a small, oblong, sandy island lay close inshore. I had been smoking a cigarette after breakfast, and was lazily leaning against the wheel-house, when suddenly I was shot forward and found myself sprawling on the deck.

A shiver seemed to thrill the vessel, and a curious grating sound was heard.

"Reverse engines!" calmly cried our captain, Lieutenant Colville, of the Royal Navy.

But the order was of no avail; we had somehow run upon a sunken rock, which we found out later to be the only rock for miles, and we were jammed upon it with a vengeance. Like a horse suddenly pulled up when in full career, the ship strained to go forward; the reversed paddles only churned up the waters, and the steamer slowly swung out of her course, for she was simply spitted, and was slightly heeling over to starboard.

Vigorous language was used to the pilot. His sound eye sparkled the brighter with evident satisfaction at our plight as he gave his lying explanation of the disaster. But there was no time to argue with him; the steamer was sinking. Fires were at once drawn, and the only boat we carried was got ready for the wounded. I hurried to Poe. Though a little paler, he was bearing the strain bravely. Two men were holding on to his bedstead to save it from sliding a-port. When the boat came alongside, the steamer was fast settling at such an angle that Poe's bed could luckily be shifted quite easily over the side-rails. At this moment the Greeks, who were very excited, made a rush for the boat; I was asked to keep them at bay, which I did, till the little craft with her miserable freight was at a safe distance from the sinking steamer.

The captain also requested me to go below to see what water we were making. I reported that it was pouring through the saloon windows. There was now considerable confusion owing to the foreign element

on deck, for the water was welling up from the engine-room. Orders were given to prepare for the worst, and the majority of us stripped. A blue-jacket was hurrying by me with some life-belts. I secured one, as the current was strong and I was not an expert swimmer. The vessel now gave a great lurch to starboard, her bow dipping under; and I, with many others, on hearing the cry, "Save yourselves," jumped. I had been under a whaler in the Nile during the early part of the campaign, and I resolved not to repeat the sensation with the *Nassif-il-Kir*. I jumped far, and in another moment I was whirled away into mid-stream.

The belt probably saved my life, but it came near being the death of me. It was a small one, and in trying to get my head and shoulders through the loop I stuck in the act with one arm in and the other out. The result was that my head was canted over on my left shoulder, and my mouth, therefore, in dangerous proximity to the water. To make things worse a strong wind arose, breaking the surface of the river into little wavelets which surged round about me, broke in my face, and at times almost prevented me from breathing. Occasionally strong eddies would whirl me round and round and suck me under; then I would shoot up again with the buoyancy of my belt, choking and struggling for dear life, till an hour of this buffeting made me think life was rather dear at the price, and I almost resolved to disengage myself from the belt and, out of sheer weariness, allow the waters to swallow me. Then the memory of the dear old Country would loom up before me, and the faces of those I loved: and I would strike out once again for the shore, but hopelessly, for the

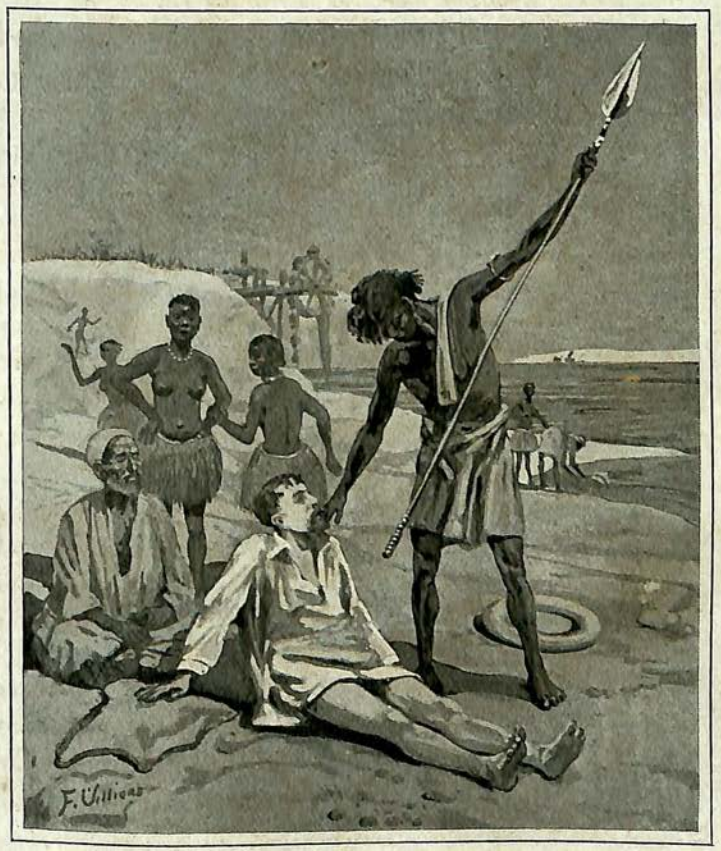
current was like a mill race. In one of these futile fights with the waves, I saw a man swimming towards me. He had his helmet on and I noticed a yellow paper stuck in its puggaree. I struggled to meet him, thinking we might re-adjust the life-belt and assist each other ashore. He seemed gradually gaining on me. I stretched out my hand. The helmet whirled by me, and to my horror there was no one under it. The poor fellow had disappeared. Towards noon I became conscious of my feet touching something soft. I struggled onward, and found myself on *terra-firma*. A few yards in front of me was a sand bank and above me was a large sakieh, or irrigation wheel, creaking and moaning. I pressed forward. The water was now down to my waist, then down to my knees, and at last, thoroughly exhausted, I stumbled onwards, clutching at the bank. Something flashed over my head and fell on my body. It was a grass rope torn from the sakieh. I had just strength enough left to twist it round my wrists, and then, clutching it with both hands, waited the result. Soon I found myself being dragged up the slope. The shingle cutting into my flesh gave me great pain. I must have become unconscious, for the next thing that I remember was sitting up on the sand with the sensation strong upon me that I had been somehow dozing. With shrill cries several dusky forms were flying from me in all directions. These were Soudanese ladies, who, with the inquisitiveness of their sex, had been examining this apparently dead, strange-looking, white creature cast up on their shore. Their cries of consternation at my untimely awakening were still ringing in my ears when a burning thirst came upon me, for my only garment was a flannel cricket

shirt, and the sun in the Soudan at high noon is a baking one.

I found seated close around me a number of men and boys. I made signs to them for water, but they shook their heads and offered some mealies instead, thinking I had had water enough. Presently a boy came running up from the river with a soldier's helmet which had been washed ashore. I recognised it at once, for the yellow paper still stuck to its puggaree. As the boy jammed it on my head, and it crushed down over my temples, an icy chill ran through my veins. It seemed to be a gift from the dead, a grim but valuable return for my attempt to save its owner. But for that helmet I should have certainly succumbed to the fierce heat of the sun. I felt happier now my head was protected, and looked round with a smile at the assembled gaping crowd.

The ladies whom I had scared by my sudden coming to life had returned, and there was much talking and wonderment about this curious stranger with the pink skin and the green eyes. Was my epidermis diseased? How wonderful! I was white all over!

On my right sat an elderly man who held the other end of the grass rope which had hauled me high and dry. I pressed his hand in gratitude for his timely help, when my shoulder was suddenly tapped rather roughly from behind. On looking up I discovered a tall, fanatical-looking dervish standing over me. In his right hand was a spear. At first I thought he was about to plunge it into my body. I closed my eyes and waited. I was too weak to resist. Then I saw the barb lifted on high, the blade in the fierce sun flashing a long shaft of light towards the heavens. In a



"ON LOOKING UP I DISCOVERED A TALL, FANATICAL-LOOKING DERVISH STANDING OVER ME."

loud voice, which seemed to silence the gibbering crowd, the dervish shouted, "Allah! Allah!" I understood him now; he wished to impress on me that which at the moment I had quite forgotten, that an almighty Providence had saved me. I felt abashed. It seemed curious to be reminded in this way by a person whom most people looked upon as a fanatical savage. He was a good, big-hearted savage, too, for when I tried to walk, after the first hundred yards my blistered feet could not stand the burning sand. Seeing my distress, he hurried into the crowd, and after much confusion and excitement, returned triumphantly with a pair of sandals. I was then led along the bank of the Nile in the direction of the wreck, and at last found myself with my fellow survivors. Poor Poe was under the shadow of a tree, and, I was glad to see, not suffering so much as I expected from his terrible shifting about.

Towards evening we sighted the stern-wheeler *Lotos*, and he, with the rest of the wounded, was taken on board. The *Nassif-il-Kir* was not entirely submerged. Her stern still hung on a pinnacle of rock. The rest of the survivors of the wreck were encamped on the small island close in-shore. I crossed over and joined the little party, the captain having resolved to remain there, pending the finding of the bodies of the drowned. Divers had been at work on the wreck and had recovered some blankets, tinned beef, and a barrel of rum. We made tents of the awning of the ill-fated paddle boat, and lived fairly comfortably for several days, till a steamer came to our rescue. Luckily the weather was extremely warm, night and day, and I found my cricket shirt almost superfluous clothing.

On examining the piece of yellow paper stuck in

the Solah Topi I found there was writing upon it which the water had nearly obliterated. It was a receipt for a postal order sent by the late owner to his sweetheart in Old England. Poor fellow! that afternoon his corpse was washed ashore, and before sundown I raised his own helmet in respectful salutation as his body was laid in the sand.

XVI.

I AM TAKEN PRISONER.

The Third Attack on Plevna—I Try to Distance my Rivals—I am Placed *Hors de Combat*—A Prisoner—My American Friends are Amused—He Laughs Best Who Laughs Last.

THE Russian battalions were concentrating in preparation for the third attack on Plevna, and therefore we war correspondents thought fit to take a brief holiday. We had ridden out to Gorni Studen from the advance posts, and were wallowing in certain luxuries we had purchased from a Jew sutler—raw pork-and-garlic sausage, dried fish, cakes of white bread, and vodka, which smelt very much like furniture polish and was probably similar in taste, though I was not very well acquainted with the flavour of the latter.

We were having a rare good time, we correspondents, for we had been living on coarse black bread and a dark, mysterious compost called by courtesy soup, which was the principal ration of the Russian soldier, during the last ten days. On the afternoon of the third day after our arrival at Turnu-Magurelle, the sound of distant gun fire came rolling over the hills from the direction of Plevna, and then our gaiety was quickly put a stop to, for this meant serious business. We cursed the obstinacy of the "unspeakable Turk" both loud and long, put some sausage in our pockets, filled our flasks, and hurried to the front.

Our company consisted of three American correspondents, myself, and the representative of the *Times*. My transatlantic brethren possessed a cart, harnessed to which were two smart little native horses. My pony, poor brute, had had a sore back for weeks, and was a sadly weary animal, for he was the only mount I could procure during the campaign. The great ambition, naturally, of a war correspondent is to be the first in the field. This feeling was always strong upon me, so by the time the Americans had tumbled into their cart I was well in advance of them, and trying to keep by the side of my friend Dobson, of the *Times*, who rode a much faster animal than I. In my anxiety to keep his pace my horse stumbled several times, and at last came down on his knees. In trying to rally him I was thrown, my right foot caught in the stirrup, and I was dragged for a considerable distance until the pony, finding that something unusual had occurred, came to a standstill and looked round at me. He could not befriend me any further, poor brute, for I was stretched full length in the dust, with my heel still in the stirrup-gear, and for the life of me could not stir an inch.

There I remained, a ghastly-looking object, smothered in dust and my face caked with blood, for in addition to other damage I had got a nasty cut across my forehead. Dobson was so anxious to get on to the front that he never looked round to see what had become of me. When the Americans came up, though naturally delighted that I was placed *hors de combat* so soon, they were, nevertheless, good Samaritans, put me in their cart, tied my horse behind, washed and dressed my wounds at the nearest well, and one good fellow, who had stuffed a towel between his coat and his back to keep the sun

off, denied himself this protection and tied it round my head.

All this time the sound of fighting was becoming louder and more loud. The excitement of the situation revived my spirits, and by the time we arrived within the Russian lines I was able to walk steadily and do a little sketching.

It had been a reconnaissance in force, a charitable term generally given to an attempt to take a position when the attempt has failed. This had been the case with the Turks, for in spite of capturing two guns, with which the Russians had tried to stem their advance, they had been compelled to retire, for the Muscovites had not been caught napping. Though driven from the Pelischat ridge, they had hurried up further artillery into position, and were now pounding away at the enemy, who were slowly falling back into their entrenchments outside Plevna.

In this futile attempt to break through the Russian lines the enemy lost over twelve hundred, killed and wounded.

Just before sunset I had come up to a few beech and walnut trees, under cover of which the sturdy troops of Osman Pasha had littered the ground with little heaps of dead and dying. Shells had played havoc with the trees and men; in the furrows of the field were little pools of blood that were being rapidly absorbed by the thirsty soil, leaving dark, ruddy, glutinous patches, malodorous and sour, which mirrored the dying sun. One shell had ploughed its way right through the Turkish fighting line, and its cruel course was registered on the bodies of several men, or what remained of men, for they were simply blotches of mangled bone, flesh,

and shreds of cloth, lying in the shadow of a wide-spreading beech. I was sketching the ghastly trail of this murderous projectile—fighting was still going on in little rallying groups as the Muscovites doggedly followed up the Turkish retirement towards Plevna—when suddenly several Russians hurried up to me. One man lifted up his musket to strike me down with the butt of it, when another, a *sous-officier*, caught the weapon in its descent and at the same time grasped me by the collar. It was so soon done that I could hardly realise what had happened, but I knew my head was bleeding afresh, for blood was trickling down my face. The situation dawned upon me. Of course, I was evidently taken for one of the enemy. I tried to explain, for now an excited and angry group of Russian infantry were hustling me on all sides. I let them drag me whither they would, and eventually found myself being taken towards a little white tent which had just been erected on the Pelischat knoll behind the Russian batteries. Presently a sergeant, who had now taken charge of me, was called by a voice from within the tent, and I was led before the commandant.

To my astonishment I found, seated on a Bulgarian rug which had been looted from one of the villages, my three American friends. On a campstool by a small table was the Russian officer. He told the sergeant, who was holding me tightly by a piece of rag which he had twisted round one of my wrists, to loosen his hold, and said to me:

"You're an Englishman?"

"Yes."

"How is it that you were found fighting along with the Turks?"

I accounted for myself satisfactorily, explaining that I was attached to the Russian army, and that I considered it rather inhospitable treatment to be handled so roughly by Russian soldiers.

At first he seemed disinclined to believe me, and the American trio on the ground smiled blandly at my sorry plight, turned their heads away, and apparently disowned my society altogether, leaving me to struggle out of my difficulties the best way I could.

After looking through my papers, the officer said:

"You are now free to go, but you mustn't complain of ill-treatment, for Englishmen are fighting with the Turks, and you were captured apparently wounded. How are my men to know? We are continually hearing of British officers fighting in the Turkish ranks."

I told him it was a great mistake. There were no British officers fighting on the other side, and no officer in the British Army was allowed, on pain of being cashiered, to fight for the Turks.

"Oh, my friend," exclaimed the Russian officer, "I cannot believe that, for British officers have been seen in the recent fight in their red coats."

Here I could not refrain from laughing at the absurd story.

"'Tis so, I tell you," he shouted angrily.

My American friends were now grinning with considerable satisfaction at my awkward predicament, probably thinking my arrest and consequent detention would make one rival less in the race to get the account of the recent sortie to the postal base.

"Besides," added the colonel, "we have picked up any number of English rifles. Look, what do you say to that?"

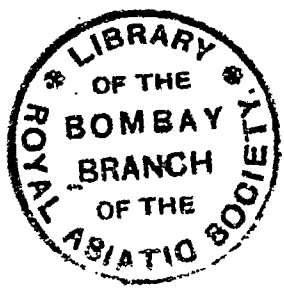
And he handed me one that was leaning against the tent-pole.

"There is proof. That is English enough."

I examined the rifle, and read the maker's name on the breech.

"There is some mistake here," said I. "This is not English. The mark on the piece is 'Springfield, Massachusetts,' and it has been supplied to the Turks"—with a wave of my hand—"by the countrymen of your American friends here."

The tables were turned on my transatlantic companions; and then the colonel, now evidently amused at the situation, was good enough to supply me with a glass of Russian tea and a Laferme cigarette.


LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

XVII.

BERESFORD'S BAPTISM.

Arabi's Rebellion—The Egyptian Soldier of Those Days—His One Military Accomplishment—I am Invited on Board the *Condor*—Beresford's Gallantry—I am the Bearer of Exciting News—A Jovial Little Party—The *Condor's* Orders—"If an Opportunity Should Occur"—The Opportunity Occurs—"Well Done, *Condor!*"

MEN who to-day are still middle-aged cannot have forgotten how Arabi the Egyptian began to figure as a great national leader in the land of the Pharaohs in the early months of 1882, and how an outbreak of fanaticism among his followers caused the memorable massacre of Europeans in Alexandria on the 11th of June of that year.

I had received orders to repair promptly to the scene of the disturbance on behalf of my paper. I little thought at the time that that incident in the famous historic Egyptian port would be the indirect cause of sundry campaigns in and about the valley of the Nile, the vicissitudes of which it would be my good fortune to share with the gallant British soldiers.

Since that little flare-up twenty years ago set Egypt ablaze and ignited the Soudan, eight distinct campaigns have taken place in that country, six of which I have witnessed, till the fanatical fire has apparently died out for ever in the destruction of the Khalifa and his reckless followers.

When I landed in Alexandria in June, 1882, Arabi

Pasha, the Egyptian patriot and Commander-in-chief of the Khedivial army, had just entered the town with a strong force of infantry to restore order and protect the property of Europeans. Nevertheless, Europeans had very little confidence in Arabi, and were leaving the port daily with their goods and chattels to seek safety on board the ships in the harbour. The soldiers whom Arabi commanded were a slip-shod, musket-nursing set, and lacked the discipline and smartness of their British-officered brethren of to-day. In those days a fellaheen soldier calmly seated on a chair, borrowed from an adjacent shop, sewing buttons on his uniform while on sentry-go, or standing bootless in his sentry-box to keep his feet cool, was a common sight in the streets of Alexandria.

Yet, withal, the Egyptian soldier was cleanly in attire, sparkling with metal buttons on his dazzling white tunic and also picturesque in colour, in virtue of his deep red fez in tone with the olive brown of his countenance.

In those days sewing buttons on his tunic was about the only martial accomplishment in which he excelled. Still, the populace feared him, and Alexandria was tranquil till the morning of the 11th of July, when British shells began singing through the air.

Long before this date things had become excessively uncomfortable in the town. The flight of the Europeans made the Arabs very insolent, and the hotel accommodation suffered from lack of service and scantiness of food. I was therefore glad when the commander of H.M. gunboat *Condor*, whom I had met at Mar Lodge the previous autumn, asked me to take pot-luck on board his ship, suggesting in his cheery way that it might be

safer and even more comfortable than quarters in the town. He was right. A bed in a swinging cot, a bath in a silver tub, and the freedom of a well-stocked wine store were things certainly not met with ashore.

The *Condor*, by reason of her short draught, was moored in the inner harbour close in shore under the shadow of the Ras-el-tin palace, the summer residence of the Khedive. There were many stories afloat regarding the close proximity of Beresford's gun-boat to the palace. One was that she was told off to assist the ladies of the Khedivial hareem to escape, if Arabi, the rebel, should suddenly show his teeth and surround the palace.

If this story were true, surely there was no man in the service fitter to do this delicate work than Beresford, for his gallantry to all ladies in distress was proverbial: As the naval officer deputed to look after the refugees from the city on board the numerous "tramps" in the harbour, he had, by his urbanity and gentleness, gained the admiration and confidence of the woman-kind of all the various nationalities seeking the protection of the British fleet. Many a scheme was suggested by those on board the *Condor* for the rescue of the Khedive's wife and children, if things came to a crisis.

About two hundred yards from the palace, at the beginning of the narrow isthmus, in which stands the lighthouse of Ras-el-tin, was apparently a gigantic mushroom with its white top glistening in the strong glare of the sun. The commander of the *Condor* always had a decidedly suspicious regard for this object, as it was the cover to the only dangerous piece of ordnance that Arabi might possess when the rupture with the British Fleet took place, for it was more or less in those

days a breech-loading, quick-firing gun "en barbette," and could be raised and lowered and was capable of a plunging fire.

Beresford provided, however, for any trouble that might arise from this battery by converting the shore-side of the *Condor* into a temporary ironclad by dressing her in chain-armour; every scrap of spare iron and chain found on board was hung over her bulwarks, giving her quite a rakish list to starboard. Day and night a watchful glass was continually turned towards the monster mushroom, but the gun below was never seen, for we found afterward its lifting gear was out of order, so it was not able to test the *Condor's* coat of mail.

After a hard day's work in the stuffy streets of Alexandria, I used to look forward to Lord Charles Beresford's breezy hospitality at night—the dinner on deck under the soft light of an Egyptian moon, the table graced with all the artistic odds and ends which embellish the tables of well-appointed homes, right here in face of the guns of the enemy's forts. Here we would enjoy our evening meal, eating our fish before our meat when to-morrow at the same hour we might already be meat for the fishes, for each day-dawn brought us nearer to a rupture that would set the ships blazing at the forts, and the forts blazing at the ships. This event came to pass rather sooner than we expected, and I happened to be the indirect cause of precipitating the inevitable affray.

I had landed one morning at the Marina, when I met a smart, enterprising Scotchman, a store-keeper of Alexandria, who supplied the British Fleet with fresh beef and coal. He was full of some important news which he presently imparted to me. Arabi Pasha had

defied the ultimatum sent in by the British Admiral, by mounting additional guns in the forts. This was important information, for Sir Beauchamp Seymour had intimated to the Egyptians that if any guns were mounted after a certain date he would regard the act as a *casus belli*, and the British ships would immediately resort to bombardment.

"What are your proofs that Arabi has thus defied the Admiral?"

"You shall soon have them," said he. "If you drive at once to my brother's house overlooking the old harbour, you will see from the balcony what work the Arab gunners have been doing during the night."

I hurried to the address given me, and with the assistance of a telescope I sketched the cannon that had been dragged into position during the night and had been deserted by the gunners as soon as daylight discovered their movements. I returned to the carriage, drove straight to the Marina, and rowed out to the *Condor*, when, on informing the Commander, he promptly carried the important tidings to the Admiral. A smart young officer who is now a major-general disguised himself as an Arab boatman, and volunteered to corroborate my information. To test his disguise he attempted to board the American warship, but the make-up was so perfect that the Yankees turned the deck-hose on him. Luckily he was in full retreat down the side of the vessel when this happened. He then rowed ashore and was able to prove the treachery of Arabi, and eventually the order was given for the British ships to clear for action.

Never shall I forget the last meal on board the *Condor* before the fighting commenced. The Commander of

the vessel had invited the captains of the French, German, and American ships to dinner, and a right jovial little party we made on deck. How peaceful the city looked as the glorious moon lit up its mosques and minarets!

"Ah! by this time to-morrow," I reflected, "that peaceful city may be in ashes, and some of yonder fleet calmly shadowing the sparkling waters may be at the bottom of the harbour!"

But soldiers and sailors are too busy and too light-hearted to think of what to-morrow may bring. We were all very merry that night. There was but one gloomy man at the cheerful board, and that was the French captain; and the reason of his melancholy was that he would have no opportunity of distinguishing himself, since his Government had decided to keep out of the trouble, and had refused the British invitation to join in the enterprise.

Characteristic speeches were made by the guests. The American said many good things, but one I shall always remember.

"Well, Beresford, I guess I should just like to be waltzing round with you to-morrow dropping a shell in here and there; and I know," pointing at the German captain, "that I am expressing the sentiments of that Dutchman yonder, when I say that he would like to do the same."

The German arose in his wrath, grew red in the face, then saw the joke, sat down again, and we all burst out laughing. It's a common thing in America to call a German a Dutchman, but in Germany it is not advisable to try it on with a Prussian officer, naval or military.

The Frenchman was quite pathetic at parting. Pressing the hand of his host, he sorrowfully said:

"Monsieur le Capitaine, it is the fault of my Government; but, if I am not with you in body, I shall be with you in spirit. Adieu!"

Shortly before sunset that day, Lord Charles Beresford, who had been in close consultation with the Admiral on board the flag-ship, returned to the *Condor* and at once called the crew together, when from the bridge he gravely addressed them somewhat to this effect:

"My men, the Admiral's orders to the *Condor* for to-morrow are to keep out of action, to transfer the signals of her bigger sisters, to more or less 'nurse' them if they get into trouble." Eloquent groans burst from the men. "But," continued their Commander, "if an opportunity should occur," and he, Beresford, rather had an idea that it would, "the *Condor* was to take advantage of it and prove her guns." The crowd of upturned faces, listening to these significant remarks, now shone with satisfaction in the ruddy after-glow of the sunset; and then Lord Charles added: "No matter what happened, he was confident that they would give a good account of themselves and their smart little ship."

To see the gleams in their eyes, who could doubt that within their breasts beat hearts as stout as in those hearts of oak of the grand old days? During the morning all available canvas had been got out and draped round the inboard of the ship's bulwarks and hammocks had been slung round the wheel to protect the men and steering gear from flying splinters. The mainmast was lowered, the bowsprit run in, and the gatling

in the maintop canvassed round; even the "idlers"—who constitute the stewards and engine-room artificers on board a warship—were armed and drilled. Nothing was left to the morning but sanding the decks.

There was little sleep that night. As I lay in my cot, courting slumber, in the fitfulness of my dreams I could catch the familiar squeaking noise of the fiddle coming from the fo'c'stle as the crew passed the feverish hours before the impending action with a hornpipe or some popular ditty. Even the old gunboat seemed to bestir herself long before dawn, for the hissing of steam and rattle of coal told me that the engineers were stoking her for the eventful struggle with Arabi's forts. At the first peep of day the *Condor* steamed off from her moorings, and followed the other vessels out of the harbour as they took up their stations for bombarding. After assisting *H.M.S. Téméraire*, who had fouled her chain on the Boghas reef, the *Condor* had nothing much to do. The larger ships were blazing away, but the *Condor* was marking time only, much to the disgust of the impatient crew. At last the captain decided to exploit a fort which was playing long bowls with the Admiral's ship, now anchored and bombarding Fort Mex. Away we steamed. The men stripped their jackets, the racers of the guns were oiled and the deck sanded.

As we neared Fort Marabout and its terraces and embrasures, bristling with Armstrong guns, loomed out of the morning haze, not a man aboard but knew the peril of our audacity—for a little gunboat, one of the smallest in Her Majesty's service, to dare attack the second most powerful fortress in Alexandria. But the shout of enthusiasm from the men when the order was

given to "open fire" readily showed their confidence in their beloved leader.

The guns run out "all a-port" blazed away. The smoke hung heavily about the decks. The flash of the cannonade lit up for a moment the faces of the men already begrimed with powder and steaming with exertion, for the morning was hot and sultry. The captain from the bridge, with glass in hand watching anxiously the aim of her gunners, would shout from time to time:

"What was that, my men?"

"Sixteen hundred yards, sir."

"Give them eighteen this time, and drop it in."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Then a shout from the men in the mainmast told us on deck that the shot had made its mark. The little ship quaked again with the blast of her guns. Gunners became as black as negroes with the powder, and were compelled to continually dip their heads in the sponge buckets to keep the grit from their eyes. At this moment, luckily a slight breeze lifted the fog of smoke and all on board could plainly see the enemy working in their embrasures. One of our shots had fallen well within the enemy's works, and another had taken a yard of a scarp off. The Arab gunners now deliberately trained one of their Armstrongs in our direction. At the same moment our engine-bell sounded, and the *Condor* at once steamed ahead. There arose a puff of smoke from the fort, which was immediately followed by a dull boom, then came the rush of a shell through the air, and a spout of water leapt up far a-starboard.

A hearty cheer burst from our men, for the enemy

had missed us! When the Arabs reloaded their guns and brought them to bear once more, the *Condor* steamed astern and the shell whistled across her bows.

The enemy's fire on the ships attacking Fort Mex slackened, and soon ceased altogether.

Irritated by the constant fire of the *Condor*, the Egyptian gunners now devoted their entire attention to us, and commenced slewing their other Armstrongs in our direction. The long black muzzles of the guns slowly turned their gaping mouths towards us. The *Condor's* crew looked at each other, then most of them gave an inquiring glance at the captain, for the situation was becoming critical. In an instant he decided, and gave the order for the ship to run in closer, and she steamed within twelve hundred yards. We all saw in a moment the wisdom of this seeming audacity, for we had run well within their guard, and though the Gyppies now blazed at us with the greatest fury, they could only practise at our masts, for they could not depress their guns sufficiently to hull us.

We cheered again and again as their abortive attempts to get at us failed. For a shot below the water mark, with the lurch the *Condor* was already making with all her guns a-broadside, would have sent her down into Davy Jones's locker in less than ten minutes.

The Egyptians in their rage opened fire from the lower parapet with their smooth-bores. The round shot would whistle through our rigging, making us lie low awhile, but our gunners would scramble to their feet again, drop another nine-inch shell well within their works, scattering their gunners and making things quite unpleasant for them. Only once did the enemy touch us, when a deep thud made the little ship tremble

"THE GUNS, RUN OUT ALL A-PORT, BLAZED AWAY!"

from stem to stern. The carpenter was ordered below, there was an anxious moment or two, when at last he returned, reporting the glad news that "All was well" —we had only been grazed.

It was a scorching, thirsty time on deck. The particles of carbon from the heavy smoke of the powder dried up our throats till we almost choked. However, the captain's steward was always ready to quench the thirst of the guests, Mr. Moberly Bell, the now famous manager of the *Times*, and myself, with cool drinks whenever we found time between the shots to rush below. But more than once as the tumbler reached our lips the blast of the guns almost shattered the glass against our teeth, and we anxiously rushed back again to see how the shot had told.

All the time during this little duel between the *Condor* and Marabout, the navigating lieutenant, with eyes fixed on the chart, was calmly moving the vessel up and down the dangerous and intricate passage of the Boghas Pass. We could distinctly see, by peering over the side of the vessel, the black track of the deep water and the glistening reefs on either flank of the narrow channel, which the slightest mistake in steering would bring us in contact with.

After silencing two of the enemy's guns, the *Condor* was obliged to retire out of action for want of ammunition. And how the Admiral signalled "Well done, *Condor!*" for her plucky little exploit is now a matter of history.

The episode of the *Condor* was one of the pleasantest I have ever taken part in. There was no blood or hurt about it—at least with us. The late Archibald Forbes in one of his charming lectures referred to the early days

of the Russo-Turkish campaign as a perpetual picnic with a battle thrown in here and there for variety. This affair of ours was a water-party, with just sufficient powder burnt to create an appetising thirst with a long drink thrown in now and again to quench it.

After having for a short time covered the landing party sent to spike the guns of Fort Mex, the *Condor* was ordered to carry the Admiral's despatches to the *Chiltern*, the telegraph-boat out at sea.

Poor Cameron came on board—the *Standard* special correspondent who died with other heroes in the struggle for the relief of General Gordon in 1885. Many Englishmen must remember those remarkable telegrams of his, giving the exciting details of the bombardment, that from hour to hour were cried through the London streets in special editions of the *Standard*. But few knew under what trying circumstances this brilliant coup in journalism was achieved. Directly we put to deep sea the *Condor*, whether intoxicated with the excitement of battle or inebriated with her newly acquired fame, behaved herself when outside the harbour like a Channel packet boat in choppy weather, for she pitched and rolled terribly.

Cameron suffered much through *mal-de-mer*. From the captain's cabin to the upper deck and the side of the vessel he was continually rushing to and fro scribbling away at his telegrams in the intervals of his paroxysms of sea-sickness. When we reached the *Chiltern* he staggered on board more dead than alive, but his despatches had plenty of vitality in them, and formed one of the ablest pieces of work he ever did for his journal and English readers.

When we returned to Alexandria the ironclads had finished their work of destruction.

About five in the afternoon the fleet retired to the rendezvous outside the reefs and passes. The famous historic city lay wreathed in smoke, and as the shades of night fell around, the glare of the burning hareem of the Ras-el-tin palace was apparently the only sign that the great God of War that day had sailed in Egyptian waters.

XVIII.

WEIRD TROPHIES.

The Bulgarian Atrocities— A Visit to the Balkans—My Guide Abdullah—Batac—An Uncanny Commission—My Superstitious Fears—*Post hoc, propter hoc?*

"AND you grow this champagne?" said I, nodding to mine host of the evening, an elderly English gentleman of gaunt visage and with a weary look in his eyes.

"Yes," replied he, filling my tumbler the while with the sparkling beverage. "You seem to like it. I shall be most happy if you will permit your servant to pack three bottles in your kit when you start to-morrow. Their contents will cheer and warm you on your cold journey up the Balkans."

I expressed my reluctance in reducing his store by such a quantity, but mine host's persuasive manner was overpowering, and I easily succumbed. It was rare to find sparkling wine of such good quality in Roumelia. My friend had suffered many years from nervous prostration following a painful surgical operation, for the cure of which incessant movement, change of scene, and champagne as a tonic were recommended by his medical advisers. He had come out to the Maritza Valley for the necessary change, and also with the philanthropic view of distributing a relief fund subscribed by charitable people in England in aid of the then sorely oppressed Bulgarian peasantry, and had

brought with him a stock of excellent wine from his own vineyard in the vicinity of Epernay, where he had resided during the last few years for the benefit of his health.

"You need not be afraid to take it," continued my friend. "I have plenty. You will not be robbing me, good as it is. The wine does not cost me more than fifty cents a bottle, even when delivered in this ramshackle old slum of Tartar Bazarjik."

"Very well," I replied, "I will drink your good health to-morrow night in Batac. By-the-bye, about this modern Golgotha—this dismal town of blood and murder. Are the stories true? Or are they tinted with what some writers are accredited—local colour?"

"My dear fellow," said my host, with a serious expression on his face at my rather flippant manner, "you will find the accounts of Turkish brutality and Bulgarian suffering true enough. More than one-third of the population of Batac have been ruthlessly butchered. Men, women, young girls, and little children have been slain. Their bones still strew the streets and alleys of the town, and the blood of many yet bespatters the walls of the old church, where, in their terror, they sought sanctuary in vain."

"Enough for to-night," cried I. "Say no more, my dear sir, or I shall not sleep, and I must be up betimes in the morning."

As I rose from my chair my companion enjoined on me not to forget an engagement to dine with him the evening of my return. "The Kirmakan and his staff

are especially invited to meet you," he added, "and you must not disappoint."

"Rely on me," I replied. "Of course—that is, if I find the objects of which I am in search: the types of Bulgarian skulls, you may remember, I told you I had promised to procure for my surgeon friend in old England."

"Have no fear about that," sighed my host. "You will find in one hour enough to stock the surgical schools of Europe."

I was soon rolled up in my furs on the ottoman in my room. Luckily I dreamt of sunny vineyards and my friend's good wine. No sickening nightmare of Bulgarian horrors disturbed my slumbers, and I awoke by my servant stirring up the live charcoal from the well of the metal brasier standing in the centre of the room and commencing to cook the morning coffee.

"Light another candle, Mustapha," I cried. "And in packing, take care of those bottles with the silver corks—the Frankish sherbet water. See the straw is thick around their sides, good Mustapha. If you break them, by the beard of the Prophet I'll——"

My sentence was cut short by mine host of the previous evening shouting from an adjacent room:

"Don't forget the third night from now. You dine with me, remember. Good-bye and good luck."

The packing was soon done. Two hours before the grey dawn stole over the plains we were well on our way towards the Balkans, skirting the south of the Maritza Valley.

The shrill cry of the Muezzins from the minarets of Bazarjik, calling all good Moslems to early prayer,

pierced the frosty air when we came to our first halt, and I tumbled out of my rugs to inspect our modest cortége.

A Zaptieh, or Turkish mounted policeman, acted as our guide and protector. He was a picturesque individual, wearing a Zouave jacket and wide trousers of blue cloth, embroidered with red braid. A cummerbund of red silk encircled his waist. Strapped round this was a leathern belt crowded with deadly weapons, making him a veritable stalking armoury. A pair of richly mounted flint-lock pistols were stuck in the upper pockets of the belt; below was a yataghan with hilt of ivory, studded with red coral bosses. A Winchester repeating carbine hung across his shoulders; a fez with narrow turban bound tightly round his head also enclosed his ears to keep them from frost-bite, giving him, with his piercing black eyes and clean-cut nose, a rakish, dare-devil appearance. Abdullah—for that was his name—was mounted on a lean, though high-spirited, horse of vicious aspect, arising from the mutilation of one of his ears, the stump of which lay back stiff on the animal's neck.

An Italian photographer had volunteered to go with me on this journey. He and I, with his photo apparatus, were ensconced in a waggon, or carriage, used generally for the purpose of shifting the ladies of the Turkish hareems from one house to the other. It was a gimcrack sort of an affair, built of thin wooden panels, gilt and looking-glass, on the floor of which we had to squat *à la turque*. This vehicle was drawn by two wiry little steeds. Following us came my Armenian servant on a gaily caparisoned mule, looking almost as truculent

as the guard, for he carried a yataghan and a revolver. His quadruped was normal in aspect, for his asinine ears, unlike our guard's horse, were not mutilated.

Soon the little village, wherein we were to stop for breakfast, gradually stood out, with the early morning sun upon it, from the foot hills of the mountains; and as the shadows of our caravan began to grow smaller our advance guard disappeared in the windings of the main street of the hamlet.

In a few minutes our waggon halted in the court-yard of its principal inn, where we let it remain till we returned from the snowy uplands. For mountain travel we took to horses, and slowly toiled up the passes till the setting sun flushed the snow with crimson.

On arriving on the plateau of the Balkan, we found that Batac was almost lost to sight in the last fall of snow; only a few of its blackened ruins broke the purity of the drifts. The fugitives that had returned to their ruined town sheltered themselves from the bitterness of the weather in the cellars, or built shanties with the *débris* of their demolished houses. In the gloom of the departing day these unhappy people would steal to the half-gutted church, the remaining walls still greasy with the blood of their friends and relatives. In the ghastly flicker of a few tallow candles stuck on the flags, these poor creatures would pray, and bewail the loss of their dear ones. This evening their sorrowing voices, blending with the sighing of the night wind, came moaning to us over the plateau.

Our destination was the wooden building called the

hospital, erected in the market-place by that philanthropic lady the late Viscountess Strangford. Here we found life, comfort, and shelter for the night. Owing to the recent fall of snow, which lay many feet deep, it was a difficult matter for me to find the types of Slav skulls my surgeon friend had commissioned me with. So I told my dragoman to start the villagers on the quest.

Early next morning, when seated at breakfast, my servant appeared and whispered: "It's all right, sir, I think I have got what you require." I immediately jumped up and hurried outside, where I discovered several old ladies gathered together in front of the hospital, holding out their capacious aprons, each containing two or three heads. At first I was much shocked —even horrified—at the grimness of the wholesale fulfilment of my requisition. But I reflected that business was business, so commenced negotiating with these ancient female ghouls by sadly picking and choosing. At last I decided on three fine specimens. These lady philosophers cheerfully parted with the heads of their decapitated neighbours for two piastres each, the equivalent in our coin to five pence. The two English nurses of the hospital made me a sack, in which the grim relics were packed. Towards midday we commenced our return journey to Bazarjik. In an hour we were leaving the plateau, and beginning to descend the mountain. Our Saptieh guard was leading; behind came the Italians and my servant, slowly following. I had started a cigarette and deep in thought was enjoying the fragrance of the Turkish tobacco, when my reverie was rudely broken by my horse pricking up his ears and hurrying down the pass. The brute had

been lagging, and with the best intention was trying to make up for lost time. This, however, is occasionally disastrous to a rider on a pack saddle. The girths were loose. Presently the gear began to sway to and fro, and I with it, for I was swathed in furs. The weather was bitterly cold, and my feet were plugged into the stirrup irons with straw. I tried to keep my equilibrium, but the saddle slipped under the horse's belly, and I found myself upside down trailing through the snow. My horse, realising at last that something was wrong, luckily for me came to a standstill, trembling with fear. My companions, arrested by my shouts, returned, and extricated me from my novel position. This was nothing much of an accident, but I became a little nervous when I discovered the cause of losing my balance was the sack of trophies tied to the pommel of my saddle. I was stricken with a sudden chill, and for the first time flashed through me the fact that those human heads were weird things to travel with. A shudder crept up my back. I shook myself and whistled, not for want of thought, but for thinking. I tried to take an interest in the frozen scenery around; but no—a depression fell on me like a pall, which I tried hard to throw off. A superstitious dread of further evil came over me.

"Well," I mused, looking at the sack, "you are for scientific purposes—will perhaps grace the walls of some surgical museum, or hang in the corner of an artist's studio. You will be better off far than lying rotting in the snow."

No; I could not comfort myself. An inner voice seemed to whisper, "Behold the mystic number 3. For each head you have taken from its native place

an accident will befall you to-day. You may chalk up No. 1; now look out for No. 2." If ever I had felt inclined to cut that sack and its uncanny contents adrift, this absurd idea got my blood up. I resolved to stick to my trophy, come what might.

I pushed on in front, with the intention of not giving my horse any further chance of lagging. Our guard was still leading. The sky was leaden and lowering. The silence of the mountain region was terrible, as if every sound lay dead beneath the winding sheet of snow. Presently a dull beating came through the air and up from the valley sailed past us a huge eagle. I turned to gaze at the majestic bird. When I looked ahead again our guide had disappeared. Where on earth had he got to? There was the road straight in front of me. I was still moving on. Before I could speak, or even think, my horse stepped into space. I madly pulled at the bridle; the animal simply pawed the air, and I went rolling over and over, being gradually disengaged from the saddle. Then all was darkness. I found myself sinking into some soft depth. An icy coldness came over me, and I discovered I was in a snow-hole, which I had made in falling through a drift. I had simply ridden over a precipice, through thirty feet of space into a snow pack, which saved me from breaking my bones on the rocks beneath. There was a great snorting and kicking a few yards from me, and my horse rose panting from his downy bed. My companions had drawn themselves up on the edge of the declivity, and were merry with laughter at my expense. Anyhow, I had the advantage, for I had stolen a march on them by making a short, though precipitous, cut to the

road below. While I was intent on watching the eagle, our Saptieh had taken a narrow pass through the woods to the left, following the route which zigzagged to the base of the mountain.

As I dug the snow out of my ears and my eyes, I could not help thinking that this little incident must be intended for accident number two; and when I readjusted the sack in front of my saddle, more and more determined was I to stick to my trophies.

On arriving at the foot of the Balkans, we took to our hareem-waggon again. It was late in the afternoon, and darkness was fast settling over the plain. The wind freshened into a hurricane, and the snow whirled in spiral eddies around us. My driver wished to turn back, for the whole white mantle covering the Maritza Valley began shifting. I insisted on an advance. Was I not to dine in Bazarjik that night? I would not keep my friend and his Turkish guests waiting.

After a short palaver, in which our Saptieh joined, enforcing the argument by ominously touching the hilt of his pistols, our coachman sulkily lashed his horses into a gallop. Shortly the cart began to sway with the furious pace we were making. Without any warning the right wheels suddenly sank. The vehicle turned quickly over. A loud crash, and I found myself sitting up with the cart in a frame of splinters. I instinctively felt about for the sack. It was intact. As the Italian and I shook ourselves free of the *débris* of that hareem waggon, I felt as if a great load had also been lifted from my heart. Here was accident No. 3. I was safe and sound.

Our mounted policeman now joined with the driver in his anxiety to return to the Balkan hamlet; but when we placed what was left of our gear on the floor of the waggon—for the splintered glass and panels had been whirled away in the snow flurries—we discovered all trace of our track was totally obliterated. To make any advance for the moment in the teeth of the hurricane was absolutely impossible. I now came to the conclusion that my friend and his Kirmakan would grow hungry if they waited dinner for me that evening. We wandered about throughout the night cutting our way through the drift to keep ourselves from falling into that lasting slumber which would have surely overtaken us if once our senses had been benumbed.

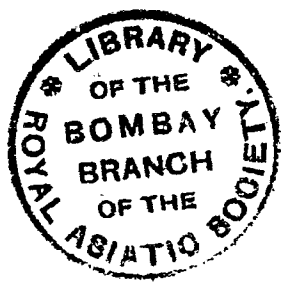
In the early morning the dogs of a Bulgarian village signalled our approach, and the inhabitants guided us to their huts by placing out flaring torches. Almost dead with cold, hunger, and fatigue, we eagerly availed ourselves of the black bread and hot plum-brandy placed before us by the hospitable Bulgars, and were soon sound asleep in a comfortable shanty by the side of a maize-cone fire.

Later in the day the storm had ceased. We were put on our right track, and eventually found our way to Tartar Bazarjik, where I discovered that though my philanthropic friend's turkey had been spoilt in overcooking, waiting dinner for me, his guests, though Mussulmans, had gone home satisfied and merry under the influence of their host's Frankish sherbet water.

The skulls were packed in a strong case and sent on their way to London *viâ* Constantinople, addressed to

my surgeon friend at King's College Hospital, labelled "Bulgarian atrocities."

They arrived safely in England and, for what I know, may have figured on many a platform at those indignation meetings which at that time set the whole civilised world ablaze.



XIX.

TEL-EL-KEBIR.

An Invitation to Dine with the Guards—I find my Hosts Flown—I Follow in Pursuit—The Night March—The Black Watch—Lieutenant Rawson, R.N.—The Battle—A Touching Incident—Daybreak—My Prodigal Pony.

THE British Army in the Egyptian Campaign of 1882 had been concentrating for many weeks at Kassassin, preparatory to the final march on Tel-el-Kebir, where Arabi Pasha intended to make his last stand.

So strong was Arabi's position that Lord Wolseley, in spite of the considerable force with him of 13,000 men, would not venture to assault the Egyptian works by day, so he resolved on a night attack. On the evening of September 12th I had been invited to dine by the officers of the Grenadier Guards.

"Seven sharp. Bring your own cup, plate, knife, and fork."

Officers of the Guards are not always the fops that is sometimes supposed. The gilded salons of London society are occasionally deserted by them for less elegant apartments. For instance, the interior of the house in which I was to dine constituted one large room which was used as refectory, reception-room, and dormitory. At night, owing to the refectory atmosphere of the place, myriads of mosquitoes and less aërial but irritating insects would swarm around and attack us. During the day the flies would have it all their

own way, and nearly madden us by their persistency in absorbing all the moisture from our perspiring faces.

The Guards roughed it with admirable composure, and it was quite a common occurrence to see the heir to a British peerage standing patiently in the doorway of our shanty with a strong contingent of flies about his head and, tin cooking-pot in hand, apologetically asking his sweating companions, who had just come off duty and were stretching themselves on the floor, whether they would object to onions in their soup. For a scout, at the risk of his life, had brought in a pocketful of leeks from the enemy's lines which he had presented to the officers' mess.

On the date I was to dine with the Guards I had been away to Ismailia to post a budget of sketches. On my return to Kassassin at six in the evening, with a considerable appetite, I found, to my consternation, that the British Army had disappeared, and with it my prospects of dinner. All that remained of the once busy encampment of the Guards were piles of heavy baggage, containing nothing edible, and the litter of a deserted camp. The cooking fires were still blazing, but the flesh-pots of the British were as much a thing of the past as the flesh-pots of the Egyptians.

However, it was not the first time I had gone dinnerless, so I gave my pony a drink of water, lit my pipe, took in my belt an inch or two, and set my face desertward in search of my hosts the Guards. As a piece of strategy, to conceal our movements from the enemy, the camp fires were kept ablaze for many hours after our forces had quitted the camping ground. Their

dull glare was an excellent guide to me, for I knew, if I held these beacons in view, that I must be moving parallel to the sweet-water canal which was on the left flank of our line of march. But soon a thin haze slowly stole over the desert, and the fires gradually died away in the deepening gloom. It was curious, this night effect—most perplexing. All noise of movement of the advancing army was lost in the soft sand; hardly a murmur penetrated the haze which set in immediately after sundown, and which surrounded one like a wreath, chilling one with its moisture. It also prevented one from seeing more than a few yards in front. The sky immediately above was clearly visible, the stars were brightly twinkling, and below the sand cast a reflected light a little upwards.

My pony was very restless, having jibbed and showed considerable nervousness for some time. At last he became almost out of hand; pricking up his ears, he snorted and pawed the ground, his eyes, almost starting from their sockets, strained to right or left, apparently seeking some object. Presently a curious sour smell impregnated the atmosphere, and a ghostly phosphorescent light dimly trembled through the mist. At this my horse stood stock still, and began violently shaking, as if suddenly attacked with palsy. Soon, straight in front of us on the desert, appeared a bluish luminous mass, which gradually took the form of the body of a dead man, lying on its back, with its skull grinning up through the bluish vapour. Ah! I shuddered; one of those wretched Arabs who met his fate in the famous charge of Kassassin but a few days ago. I pricked my horse forward, for the

night grew chill, but other horrors in the same state of decomposition barred my path and again brought my horse to a trembling halt, till, at last, sickening with the ghastly monotony of the ride, I thought to myself:

"If I don't soon find the British Army I shall probably be found, one of these hazy nights, lighting the desert in the same indistinct and unsatisfactory manner for, undoubtedly, if I proceed much further without meeting friends, some Bedouin scout will probably want to cross swords with me," and I had nothing with me but my hunting knife and a six-shooter, the latter rather an uncertain weapon in a fog.

At last, a loud neigh from my horse, which in my anxiety not to attract the enemy's attention, I almost throttled him to suppress, was answered from our immediate front by a less euphonious animal—a commissariat mule; and a moment later I almost tumbled over a veritable Tommy Atkins, who resented my familiarity with an expletive which, though vulgar, was quite a refreshing form of speech at that moment to me. I had indeed struck the 60th Rifles.

"Where are the Guards?" said I.

"On the extreme right," replied an officer, and I was also informed that the Rifles were in bivouac until midnight, and were in support of the Highland Brigade.

A night march, with the possibility of meeting the enemy before dawn, is rather, as the soldier would say, "a jumpy time"—scares are generally rife, and Tommy Atkins is an uncertain quantity till he faces the enemy.

But when he does, I am glad to say it always has a steadying effect on him, and he acquits himself like the unsurpassed soldier that he is. When I came up with the right of the Highland Brigade, which I found also in bivouac, most of the men were peacefully slumbering on their arms. It struck me that the Guards would be on their left flank, so I rode down the line till, arriving at the last companies of the 74th, I boldly marched out on to the plain, thinking that I should soon come in touch with the Grenadiers. Luckily, I fixed two stars over the Highland position before I pushed forward. I went on and on, but I found no signs of the Guards, when presently my horse came to a standstill, staring into the gloom, and I discovered a dark object moving in front of me. I covered it with my revolver and shouted, "Who goes there?" when to my surprise a man stood up and answered, "Friend."

I found that he was one of the telegraph transport, searching for the end of a lost cable. He had advanced with the army, but had missed his way and the cable too. On informing me that there were no British troops in his vicinity, I knew that we were on the line of the enemy's outposts, so I persuaded him to return with me to the Highland Brigade. No sooner had we arrived in the bivouac than a most remarkable scene took place. In the twinkling of an eye the men, with suppressed curses, were struggling to their feet and fixing bayonets, and huddling together in square formation, apparently preparing to resist cavalry. Even the supports scrambled to their feet as the panic wave passed over the desert.

"For God's sake, what's the matter?" whispered

the officers as they tried to suppress the excitement of the men.

But to this day there is no valid answer given for this remarkable scare. It was called the nightmare of that famous march. The excitement soon died out, but there was little further sleep, and the men were now pulling themselves together for the coming fray.

I had by this time come to the conclusion that it was no use hunting further for the Guards, for it was much like looking for a needle in a pottle of hay, or a bayonet on a misty desert; so I decided to throw in my lot with the 42nd Highlanders, and I rode once more into the haze of the plain.

I had not gone far before I came across the bonny Scots. The Black Watch was drawn up in line, and rations of liquor were being served out to each man from suspicious smelling water-carts, for their contents savoured more of sunny Jamaica than the muddy depths of the adjacent canal. Never was the ruddy alcohol more wisely administered than on this occasion. Almost benumbed and wet to the skin with the heavy dew of the desert, this rum ration put new life into the troops.

This could be seen when the order was given to the men to fix bayonets, for the glint of the steel was mirrored in their eyes, now brightening under the grateful ration. Veritable "dogs of war" they looked, as they stood steady, waiting for the word like hounds eager to be slipped on their quarry. Their gallant old leader, Cluny MacPherson, mounted his charger, and addressing his regiment in quiet voice, said:

"Men, not a shot is to be fired! All the work

THE TRENCHES AT
TEL-EL-KEBIR.

must be done wi' cauld steel! The Forty-twa will advance!"

In lowered tones the command passed from flank to flank, and noiselessly the dark columns moved off into the mist, for the thud of their tramping feet was lost in the velvet surface of the plains. Only an occasional clash of steel or the glint of a bayonet tokened to the night that a vast host was advancing. I stood watching this somewhat weird sight when my ear caught a curious noise, like the far distant roar of the breaker on a coral reef, and presently a long, dark, funereal line moved over the desert towards me. Amidst the sullen roar was the clanking of chains, and a grating of wheels as they crunched through the crust of the sand. Forty-two cannon in line now broke the horizon of the desert like a lowering black cloud threatening the storm. A very bad quarter of an hour the Arabs were likely to have when this enormous battery started its thunder that morning, for the whole forty-two were to open fire on any given point of the enemy's positions if our infantry received the slightest check in the trenches.

The British Army that night was led by a young naval officer, gallant Lieutenant Rawson, R.N., guided by the stars. Ah! the dawn was to see that faithful guide cut down in his youth and vigour. He was the first to fall, shot through the lungs. When death came upon him his last words were, as he pressed the hand of his chief:

"I led them straight, sir!"

The air soon became very cold—that unmistakable chill which immediately precedes the dawn of day; and presently a faint grey light penetrated the haze,

gradually unveiling the desert beyond. Before the mist had lifted sufficiently for me to quite distinguish the British battalions forming for the coming attack; from a long sandy ridge, breaking the plain in our immediate front, sparks of fire leaped up and a hail of bullets came shrieking over the plain.

Then from flank to flank of the enemy's works one lambent yellow flame seemed to rill the desert; but there was not a shot fired in return from our silent battalions now lying with stomach and chin to sand in front of that death-belching trench.

A sharp cry or a suppressed groan was the only sign that the mute army the dispersing mist was unveiling to the eyes of the astonished Arabs was of living flesh and blood. In their fright and frenzy the Egyptian troops, with half-closed eyes and unsteady nerve, fired, apparently at random, as if they had been suddenly awakened from the throes of a nightmare. Their bullets skimmed wildly over the heads of our soldiers, spurting up the sand like the dust under summer rain as they furrowed the drift beyond.

"When will the 'advance' be sounded? When will the order come?" blurted our men as they closely grovelled in the sand. The minutes seemed an eternity to the troops lying inactive under that scorching, murderous fire.

Suddenly the shrill blast of the bugles rang out on the morning air. Then springing to its feet, swiftly and silently the front line sped on. The terrible splutter of musketry from the trenches entangled the onslaught for a moment with falling, dead and dying. But only for a moment, for now our "dogs of war" gave tongue. With wild cheers and to the screech of the bagpipes,

the 42nd Highlanders and the 18th Royal Irish—for these regiments were the first to break cover—seemed to outvie each other in their anxiety to strike for the honour of their flag that morning.

Down into the gaping trench, surging up over the gilded ridge of murderous fire, our men pressed forward at the charge. Then, mixing in deadly struggle with the foe, the bloody bayonet work commenced. The yells of anguish and shouts of "Allah! Allah! Allah!" were drowned in the weird screel of the bagpipes, and in a few minutes the crisis was over. Arabi's great earthworks were captured, and the battle was won.

When the lilac dawn broke the two miles of deep trenches, stretching at right angles with the canal inland, were crowded with Egyptian dead, and large red pools were soaking into the yellow sand. The silent bayonets had done their work well. The line of retreat on the plain beyond was speckled with dead and wounded. These latter, as the sun climbed the heavens and scorched up all beneath him, sat up in their agonising thirst and whimpered for water. One old man raised himself as I passed by and muttered the Hindustani word "pani," and pointed to his parched lips. I wondered that he had lived so long, for at least two feet of his bowels were trailing in the dust from a bayonet thrust.

I counted nine of the Highlanders, all resting in easy attitudes on the desert as if in deep slumber, shot through their brains. One young officer of the Black Watch—Grahame Sterling—was dying by the side of his colour-sergeant, who had just breathed his last. I was wondering what I could do to alleviate his suffering when a little drummer boy standing near, seeing me

with pencil and paper, and thinking I was about to sketch the painful scene, snatched a pocket-handkerchief from the breast of his dying officer and gently let it fall on his face. It was a graceful and thoughtful act of the boy's which I shall never forget.

About this time the sun was well up, and the cries of the wounded for water were heartrending to hear. I was quite exhausted and without the precious liquid myself, for an accident had occurred to me early in the fight. I had dismounted when the enemy opened fire, and stood by my pony—a rat of a beast, but hardy enough. I had bought the animal in Ismailia, the only thing with four legs that I could procure. My English saddle was rather large for him, but this was obviated by fixing it up with a blanket. When the first crackle of musketry broke the stillness of the desert, he became much excited; but when the enemy shelled us, he began waltzing round so energetically that I thought I had better mount him. Whether the fatigue of the night march or his empty stomach was the cause, I do not know; but he appeared to be considerably shrunk, for I was not seated for an instant in the saddle before the whole gear slipped under the animal's belly. I slipped my feet out of the stirrups as I struck the desert, and my pony, tickled by the saddle between his legs, reared up and down like a rocking-horse, till a shell whistled over his head, when he plunged forward and bolted to the rear. It was hopeless to follow him, in spite of the fact that he carried my glasses, sketch-book, and water-bottle; so I resignedly watched him careering across the desert till he darted into the zone of shell-fire, when a splinter apparently knocked him over, for he fell and did not rise again. It was a casualty

I could not wait to remedy, so with a sigh I pushed forward toward the trenches.

As I sat contemplating the sad loss of my water-bottle after the fight was over, a colleague, who was late for the fray, came riding towards me, and in a voice of great glee said:

"Look, Villiers, here's a find." I rose and faced him with astonishment. "A rattling nice little beast, saddle and all. Found him sitting on the desert about two miles away," continued he. "Well, why the devil don't you congratulate me?"

"I do," said I; "and am much obliged for your kindness in picking him up. That pony belongs to me."

XX.

A VISIT TO NEGUS JOHN.

Sir William Hewitt's Mission—How to Get Attached to it—Mason Bey—His Solution of my Problem—Adowa and its Inhabitants—My Worcester Sauce Bottle—What it Won for Me—His Majesty the Negus Negusti.

AFTER the relief of Toka and the campaign in the Eastern Soudan had finished up with the battle of Tamai, the war correspondents assembled at Suakim had nothing to do. It was a relief to us all to hear of the intended British mission to Abyssinia to persuade King John to succour the Egyptian garrisons on his frontier, which were hemmed in by the fanatical followers of the Mahdi.

Sir William Hewitt, the British representative, was besieged by correspondents clamouring to go with the mission, but the Admiral said he could only take one representative of the Press, and that would be his personal friend, Mr. Cameron. Of course, the other correspondents were furious. Some cabled to their papers, and the result was that Sir William, as he could not take all, would not take anyone. I had not applied to the Admiral, so I had not been personally refused. I therefore sailed to Massowah, the port whence the mission was to start inland, and presented myself to Mason Bey, an American in the Khedivial service who was the Governor, and one of the most respected and trusted foreigners in the country. I told him

that I had not seen the Admiral about the matter, but that I wanted to go with the Khedivial representatives, and if he consented he would help me out of a great difficulty. And another reason, it seemed a pity that the doings of the Mission in an almost unknown country should not be chronicled by pen and pencil. Nevertheless Mason would not hear of taking a correspondent, as it would be "going back on the Admiral."

"By-the-bye," said he, just as I was going away, "I rather want a smart, respectable young man for my private secretary. If you care to apply for the billet, think the matter over and I'll see you to-morrow. In the meantime, as a correspondent I shall be most happy to offer you the hospitality of the crazy edifice which they call my palace."

At nine the next morning I changed my profession, and became a private secretary at a nominal salary with free rations and transport, and found myself one day suddenly emerging on the Abyssinian Plateau. After having journeyed through solitary mountain forests, clambered almost inaccessible heights 8,000 feet straight up from the plains, it seemed like taking one long step with the seven-leagued boots into another world, for the atmosphere that was 94° of heat below was at the same hour 43° on this airy tableland, and its inhabitants, in comparison to the people of the Red Sea littoral, almost as widely differed. On the shimmering stretches of sand and mimosa beneath us men moved about in a state of semi-nudity, ate rice and ghee, drank nothing but water, and wore their weapons like the rest of the fighting world. But here at Asmara, a distance of not more than twenty-four

hours, and only a few miles as the crow flies, people strutted about in togas almost Roman in their picturesque folds, capes of lion and leopard skin, drank intoxicating beverages, ate raw meat, spoke with their kettledrums, and, out of pure perversity, to be unlike any other people, wore their sabres on the right side of their bodies, drawing with their right arm and hand. When we arrived at Adowa, where King John was to meet us, we found the people living in houses with their cattle, fowls, dogs, cats, and a Noah's ark of insects, which they seemed to foster with the greatest care by not touching soap and using very little water. An Ethiopian will tell you without a blush that he is necessarily washed at birth, cleans himself on his marriage morn, and hopes to be washed after death; that once every year he dips himself in the river on the Festival of St. John, and regularly every morning he wets the end of his cloak with the moisture from his mouth and freshens up his eyes. Whenever he feels hard and uncomfortable, he will anoint himself with mutton fat till his body glistens in the sun.

We found the walls of the church covered with Scripture historical pictures, and, in the cathedral, with the exploits of the then ruler of Abyssinia—Johannes. His victories over the Egyptians were fully represented in tones of Rickett's blue, mustard, red-lead, and lamp-black. Though limited to these, which were the only pigments obtainable in the country, the artist did not make up for crudeness of colour by the accuracy of his drawing, and if the pictures had any merit, it was in their originality of treatment. For instance, at Gondor, in a picture representing the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, Pharaoh carries in his right hand the latest specimen

of six-shooter, and in his left he holds a pair of field-glasses, while his Egyptian host sport Remington rifles. All movement of figures is from right to left, and in all pictures heads are full-faced, with the exception of Satan and the hated Egyptians, who are painted in acute profile, to show their lack of honesty and good faith in not looking you straight in the face. It is a deplorable fact, and ladies will say at once that it proves the ignorance and barbarity of the Ethiopians, that the evil spirits in these compositions are always represented by the softer sex, generally showing their naughtiness as some children do—by putting out their tongues. The church painter goes so far as to question the gallantry of St. George—the Abyssinian patron saint—by depicting that warrior, instead of doing battle with the dragon, spearing the graceful undulations of a long-tongued woman.

A kind of parasite belonging to the Church, called the Deftara, preyed on the general ignorance and superstition of the people. He was a scribe who copied the holy books, but made a considerable income by the manufacture of love philtres, which have more or less curious effects upon the unconscious recipient. Our doctor was applied to one morning by a man for some means to alleviate the distress of his brother, who was acutely suffering from the effects of one of these concoctions administered by some jilted young lady who wanted this indifferent youth to look upon her with love and devotion. But the philtre had the contrary effect—had not touched his heart, but had upset his stomach. At first I thought this unromantic result must be a mistake; but I had found out by personal observation that the seat of affection in an Abyssinian

generally lay where the philtre attacked the doctor's unfortunate patient, for feasting seems to be the only joy and comfort he has in this country. All repasts were more or less composed of the Abyssinian *pièce de rèsistance*—raw flesh. If you happened to be seated near the open door during an Abyssinian feast, you might see this course prepared. An ox is brought into the compound, and his throat is skilfully cut. Before the animal has breathed his last, skinning is commenced, the flesh cut into long strips and brought in to the hungry and impatient guests, who devour it, not quite like wild beasts, but use weapons of all kinds, from daggers and swords to pocket-knives. The consumer of this delicacy takes one end of the strip or string of meat into his mouth, placing it between his teeth. In his left he holds the viand bodily, and with the right gives a drawing cut with his sabre through the flesh, severing it close up to his lips, and so hunks his meal away. This mode of feeding requires some practice, and has its inconveniences, especially to people with long noses, and a thirst for strong drink; for it is generally a sign when noses begin to suffer cutaneous losses from a too close proximity to dagger or sabre that the host's tedge (native drink) has been both strong and plentiful.

The Abyssinians have a curious superstition regarding eating in the open. To them a fit of indigestion from over-feeding would mean the evil eye. They would feel assured that some part of the performance of appeasing their appetite had been observed. People carry amulets containing prayers and rolls of parchment several yards long with pictures illustrative of the triumph of the Good Spirit over that wicked orb, and

are kept in their houses for protection. If an Abyssinian sells you anything, and is friendly inclined, he will caution you to keep it indoors or covered up, for if an evil eye falls on it it may spoil or disappear, which latter contingency is much more likely in his country. I have seen evil eyes going about of this description. I came across one of them walking off with some dollars from a pile in our paymaster's tent.

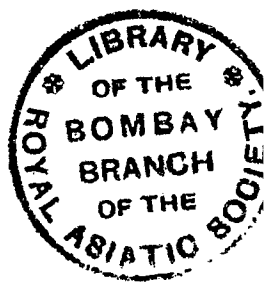
The Marie Thèrese dollar piece is the only coin recognised in the country, and they must be in good condition. The jewel on the crown and necklet must not be in any way obliterated, or the coin was condemned. We secured all the dollars we could at Massowah before we started, and on examining them carefully all those whose jewels were not intact we relegated to a separate bag for gifts to the Abyssinian priests, who made them into silver ornaments for their church. The people seemed to have no use for gold. After the defeat of the Egyptians at Gorra in 1876, when the Abyssinians captured their treasure chest containing 30,000 gold pieces, they were glad to sell the Egyptian lira, which is worth more than our sovereign, for a silver dollar of Marie Thèrese, and the Greeks—then the only European merchants in the country—made a splendid harvest at this rate exchanging silver for gold. Cloth and bars of rock salt ten inches long serve as their ordinary medium of barter. Members of our mission traded a good deal with empty beer bottles, receiving two chickens and a dozen eggs for a quart. I made firm friendship with a chief out shooting one day by presenting him with a Worcester sauce bottle, the glass stopper appearing to be the source of delight

for him. He was so certain that I must be a person of exalted position in my own country by possessing such a luxury as a bottle with a glass stopper, that he offered me his daughter—a handsome but dark young lady—in marriage. The King and Kas-Alula were the only chiefs who possessed glass bottles in all Abyssinia, and which were only used on State occasions; but these were not glass stoppered, but were plugged with mealie stalks. The Negus Negusti, the King of Kings of Ethiopia—or, as a young wag of our mission freely translated it, the Nigger of Niggers—after keeping us waiting for many weeks, at last came to meet us. We were awakened one morning early in our little encampment in the south-east corner of the Adowa Valley by a distant noise, quite undistinguishable at first, but gradually developing into the sound of a drum, slowly, methodically beating, clearly drumming out some order or command by the recurrence of the same tones.

We knew this signalled that the King was about to start on his final stage to Adowa, as for the last few days rumours had come into camp that he was slowly but surely nearing us. Presently low chanting and the tinkling of bells were heard coming from the direction of the town, and a stream of Church dignitaries, followed by a choir of boys, wended their way past our camp, and over the hills in search of their royal master, the beating of the drum never ceasing its monotonous refrain, which Captain Speedy, our chief interpreter, was now able to read. It sounded "John hoi, John hoi, John," which means in English "I am he, John, I am he, John." When he—John—at last came, Admiral Sir William Hewitt, our Queen's representative, and Mason Bey,

the Khedivial envoy, were received with their respective suites in audience by his Majesty. On entering the palace—if the huts which constituted the Negusti's residence could be called one—facing the entrance, and against the circular wall of the building, on a throne covered with violet satin cloth, and supported on either side by pillows of the same rich stuff, with the Cross of Solomon worked in gold thereon, we found seated the Negus Negusti, and King of Sion. On his right stood a servant, with a silver-handled horsehair switch, which he kept swaying to and fro, to prevent the flies from feeding off the butter on the royal head, for in the habit of greasing did his Majesty indulge as well as his lowly subjects; and the fat sparkled on his crisp hair, neatly plaited in three broad pieces, stretching from the forehead over the cranium to the nape of the neck, where they narrowed and were held together by a diamond-headed pin. Drawn up just over the tip of the nose, and totally covering the lower part of the face and body, was the shemma, or toga. The King, who looked and seemed to be all eyes and eyes, scanned us each suspiciously as we approached the throne, and bowed. He shook hands with the two envoys, this movement necessitating the partial uncovering of the body, showing the massive order of Solomon gleaming on a gown of black silk. But only for a moment was so much royalty seen, and as the Admiral and Mason Bey seated themselves, the toga was up to his mouth again, as if our presence had suddenly made him feel very ill. So far was this illusion carried, that one almost expected him to rush for the door, or call the steward; and a dim vision of the far-off but dear old Calais packet appeared to many of us.

But when servant after servant brought in the numerous bulky presents we had brought with us and placed them at the feet of the Negusti, a deep interest was apparent in his keen black eyes; and when the glittering plated weapons came to view, as box after box was prised open, Johannes gradually dropped his toga and his dignity, and became visibly affected by the sincerity of a mission thus provided with such valuable arguments.


LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

XXI.

I GUIDE THE GUIDES.

Wigram-Battye and Pollock Hamilton—The "Khokies"—My Pony and his Luminous Tail—A Successful Little Fight.

ONE of the smartest and most dare-devil officers in the Indian military service was Major Wigram-Battye, of the Guides; and one of the keenest and bravest subalterns was Pollock Hamilton, of the same famous cavalry. Battye first smelt powder at Saarbrück, with the Prussians, where the unfortunate Prince Imperial received his baptism of fire, and that day Battye received his, a splinter of a French shell laying him low for many weeks, and spoiling his intended holiday, for he was on leave from India, and had, as he said: "Looked in at the fun while *en route* for England."

I first met both of these gallant officers on a sweltering Afghan plain between Lundi-Khotal and Jellahabad, where General Tytler, V.C., with a mixed force of Indian and British troops, was keeping a section of the main road to the latter town clear of the enemy.

The hostile tribes were busy sniping all round us, and five hundred yards from the camp at dusk was a dangerous vicinity. They came down from the adjacent hills and cut up our grass-cutters or waylaid any belated traveller. These cold-blooded murders—they could be called little else, for our coolies were mostly unarmed

—irritated the General considerably, till at last a ghastly case of three unfortunates, who had been literally cut into little pieces and left on the road as an impudent menace to the hated invader, compelled Tytler to make reprisals on the lairs of these ruffians. Our General was a cautious soldier, and little was known of his intended movements by any one in camp till the moment he was about to strike. One afternoon I was wandering through the cavalry lines when I espied Battye and young Hamilton seated smoking in the shadow of their tents. On seeing me they would not let me pass till I had taken a peg and a cheroot.

"There's something in the wind to-day," said Battye. "There's an ominous twinkle in the General's eye, and I know we shall see some sport. It's the Khokies this time, I think," meaning a bloodthirsty tribe called the Khoukikails. I am not quite sure of the spelling, but that is how the British soldier designated them.

I remained with my friends till sundown, when, directly it was dark, an unusual restlessness seemed to possess the camp. Battye lit another cheroot and puffed at it vigorously.

"Hamilton," said he, "you have never seen a fight. If one comes to-night you shall go in my place, for some of ours must stay, so we can't both leave the camp."

"By Jove!" responded Hamilton. "It's awfully good of you; many thanks. Why, here's an orderly from the General coming up the lines."

In another moment Battye had read the chit, and hastily turning to his subaltern, said:

"Take fifty of ours and join Utterson. You will

have a good chance of getting in with that 'sword arm' of yours, I hope, before sunrise."

Hamilton had remarkably long arms, and his sabre reach was phenomenal.

"Villiers, here's a chance for you," added Battye. "Go and see what stuff our Guides are made of."

I hurried back to my tent, ordered my syce to saddle my pony, and within a few minutes joined the Guides at the rendezvous.

It was just the night for a raid. Absolutely black. So dark that one could almost feel the darkness.

"Drop that light, you fool! None of that to-night. Pipes out. Damn you, pass the word there!" hissed an officer under his breath, as the small force crawled noiselessly over the undulating plain.

"Villiers," whispered Hamilton, "do you know what we are going to do?"

"No."

"Well, this is it, we play at this game till just before dawn, when we are supposed to be in position round a cave village a couple of thousand feet up in the hills," and he pointed to a black mass looming in our front, the Safeh Kho range, whose serrated outlines could just be distinguished as the stars rose, which, apparently, like beacons, rested for a moment on the crest till at last they cleared the skyline and climbed the sky.

"By Jove!" whispered my friend. "It is dark in these foot hills. Where's that native guide? Ah! there he is."

We were moving in Indian file, and the long, sinuous line of horsemen heaved and sank as it slowly advanced at funeral pace, looking like a mighty, stranded sea-serpent as it wormed its way over the uneven country.

One of the troopers behind me, whose horse had been restive for some time, grunted out something in his own lingo as the animal suddenly swerved out of line. Hamilton rode up to him, and then a quiet laugh followed.

"Villiers, this trooper says your pony is bewitched. His tail is on fire, and his horse won't stand it any longer. And, great Scott! the man's right. Just look at that!" And, sure enough, whenever my pony switched his tail a spray of pale blue light flashed through the air.

"We have got into an electric charged atmosphere," continued Hamilton, "and your horse is playing the medium. Some of ours may start the racket soon; but in the meantime, do me a favour—ride by the side of the native pilot and act as a lamp to show us the road. You will merit the thanks of the Empire if you guide the Guides to glory with that pony's tail."

In a few moments I was in front, proudly leading the way. After our victory that night, I believe next morning the following verse was heard in camp:

"Freddy had a little horse
Whose tail was bright as snow,
And everywhere that Gee-gee went
The Guides were bound to go."

The tail of my pony went on striking matches till dawn stole over the mountain, and its light prevailed no longer. The night still hung over the plains. The surrounding hills, too, were in almost purple blackness; but afar off, piled-up, facing the eastern glow and apparently in mid-air, were the peaks of the Hindo-Khoosh, the highest mountain in the world, the points

of snow roseate pink in the red flush of the morning sun.

We snatched a few moments' sleep by lying along the backs of our horses with their manes as pillows, a dodge I had never seen before, and which Hamilton initiated me in. We came to a halt, and as we waited the lower peaks of the hills slowly took up the light and spread the dawn down into the valley. Our infantry seemed to be swallowed up in the rough and tumble of the ground, and apparently we were alone, on the brink of a steep, stony declivity. Below was the entrance to a narrow khor, or valley, in the rocky sides of which were the dark mouths of the caves, in which lurked the enemy. Not a gleam of daylight had yet penetrated this sullen mountain fastness and its wild, treacherous inhabitants were apparently still sleeping. Their ominous *reveille* was, however, near at hand, for suddenly the sharp rattle of musketry broke the stillness, making the blood course madly through our veins, driving at once from our bodies the chill of the raw dawn. On that rocky ridge the gaunt horsemen now sat as still as the South African aasvögel does when keenly watching the opportunity to pounce on its prey. An orderly came galloping up behind us.

"What, there?" said Hamilton, as he keenly listened to the man's story and pointed below.

"Yes; and no time to be lost, sir," answered the orderly.

As the troopers unsheathed their sabres, long shafts of light seemed to cleave the air as the first rays of the sun glinted on the steel. I looked down the slope. Surely he does not mean the men to take that? It's certain disaster, thought I. It was a good four hundred

feet, almost a sheer drop, to the first level. The rattle of the rifles now became general, puffs of smoke outlined the ridge of the khor in a semicircle, and out from the narrow defile, running like hares, came the surprised Khokies, leaping the rocks and boulders, taking cover, or hurrying towards the level below us for the purpose of climbing our hill. Hamilton waved his sword, and in a flash the Guides swept down the terrible slope. For a moment there was a scattering of stones and then horses and men were lost in a cloud of dust. When the cloud passed, the hillmen were down on their knees or running helter-skelter back to their khor, and the Guides, not a man unhorsed, were slashing and cutting their way through them, till they were swallowed up in the shadow of the khor. My pony had done his work, he had led those gallant horsemen to glory, and now stood gazing after them, and so did I, then we both took a less precipitous path and joined the infantry. Our firing line was still busy, for the devil is not easily knocked out of an Afghan. But presently they broke and scattered up the sides of the khor under a leaden hail which seemed impossible for any living thing to stand up in.

"For God's sake, don't fire at that! That's a woman!" said I, as a blue-trousered figure fell in front of one of the caves.

"How are we to know which from which," growled the man, "when the women wear trousers and the other beggars sport skirts?"

"Well, you know now, you stupid brute!" shouted a sergeant.

The "Cease Fire" was sounding down the line, so I hurried with the surgeon to where the woman had

fallen. She was lying in a faint across a native bed in front of the cave. A shot had passed through her thigh. We soon got down on the wound and stopped the bleeding. I was assisting the doctor when I received a kick in the ribs and discovered a small boy, about seven years of age, who, thinking I was hurting his mother, was furiously attacking me with hands, head, and feet. The little brat kept up the assault till we had dressed his mother's wound. Then a crowd of Tommies stood round to see fair play and it was the most ignominious tussle I have ever had.

Battye's second in command had done well for his first fight. He had captured sixty prisoners and rounded up eight hundred head of cattle. That night we changed our diet after many weeks—roast mutton for dinner instead of bully-beef.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

XXII.

FOR GORDON'S SAKE.

A Narrow Escape—Nile or Crocodile?—My New Rig-out—Stewart's Brigade—The Camel and his Little Ways—The March Across the Desert—Stewart Wounded—Gubat—Gordon's Doom—"Too Late!"

WOLSELEY'S famous expedition for the relief of Khartoum, after concentrating at Dongola, made a further advance to Korti by river and desert. About this period I unfortunately came to grief. My colleague Charles Williams and I were in a whaler trying to make headway against a very strong current on the Nile below Debbeh, and were steadily drifting toward the bank, when we were attracted by the report of a rifle which came from a pinnace steaming up the river. The captain was firing at a huge crocodile basking on a sand bank. Presently the crocodile, grazed by a shot, furiously lashed himself into the waters. We hailed the boat, and asked the skipper to tow us out of our difficulty. He shouted:

"Heave a line aboard, but be quick!"

As the little steamer came up to us and hove-to, a rope was doubled round our mast and passed to the two natives in the bows to put it through the ring at the nose of our whaler—this these coloured gentlemen, out of pure cussedness, did not do—when the line was made fast to the pinnace, and she immediately steamed ahead

at eight knots. The rope shot out of the hands of the niggers. In an instant it was taut with our mast; in another moment our boat was dragged completely over and turned turtle. I saw Williams jump clear; but being in the stern sheets it was too late for me, so in spite of my efforts I went under, and our little craft practically formed a sort of dish-cover to the repast my fertile brain imagined that the crocodile was about to make of me. Where would he begin? That was the only question. My colleague, getting exhausted, had now clung to the keel of the boat, which gradually tilting with his weight released me, and I came to the surface. The captain of the pinnace, watching for my appearance, threw a line, which luckily struck me across my forehead, bringing me to my senses. I at once caught hold, and in a few seconds I was dragged, half dead, on board.

That day I owed my life to Commander Montgomery. But for his keenness in watching me coming to the surface I should have been drowned, for I was in top-boots and overcoat, and so heavily weighted that I only rose sufficiently to take my last look round. This naval officer, who afterwards distinguished himself in the fighting at Metemneh, wears on his right breast both French and English Humane Societies' medals for saving life.

My principal thought during all this trouble was, "What a good advertisement my valise, with the name of my journal on it in large white letters, floating down stream would have made on the River Thames!" It was sadly lost on the Nile, for it contained my bed furniture, tea, sugar, canned beef, tobacco, a bottle of pickles, a pepper mill, an extra pair of boots, a dis-

patch case, and a bag of sixty sovereigns. All the rest of the kit went to the bottom of the Nile or into the inner being of the crocodile. It was a sad sight to me to see all my earthly treasures float away like this. It was a catastrophe of which only campaigners can appreciate the bitterness. I knew that my personal comfort was also wrecked for many months to come, for there were no shops or stores handy in the wilds of the Soudan. I had nothing but the clothes I stood up in, and they were excessively wet. The captain put us ashore, and next day we walked across the desert to Korti to dry ourselves, a distance of some thirty miles, arriving in camp long after nightfall.

The following morning, as soon as our plight was known, I might have set up a slop-shop with the superfluous number of odd garments sent to me by good-natured British officers and my friend John Pigott, of Reuter's. Calling on General Viscount Wolseley to report myself, he was kind enough to express regret at my accident, and was sorry he could not furnish me with some wearing apparel. He had only two flannel shirts for himself, and these were so precious that he could not afford to wash them, so simply gave them an air-bath, which in the brisk atmosphere of the Soudan did just as well. A splendid example of the soldierly qualities of a great general!

This was not the first time I had been unfortunate with my wearing apparel. Once in Egypt my kit was upset in the sweet-water canal, and remained at the bottom—a bitter experience to me, as I had nothing left but a small bag at the base of operations, containing flannel nether necessities and a dress-coat and waistcoat. I was saved from the interesting experiment of cam-

paigning in a dress-coat by a colleague, who, jealous no doubt of the distinguished figure I should cut on the line of march with swallow-tail coat, white waistcoat, and top boots, supplied me with a brown holland jacket, which was more in tone with the sands of the desert.

At Korti the base of operations was formed, the battalions massed, the headquarters stationed, and eventually the army was divided, Sir Herbert Stewart with the 2,000 of the Camel Corps crossed the desert of Bayuda to Metemneh, and a brigade of boats with some cavalry, skirting the banks, moved up the Nile to Abu Hamid under General Earle.

It was my fortune to follow the adventures of Stewart's brigade. I will not go into details of the extensive preparations necessary to an expedition of this kind. The men of the boats when they arrived at the rendezvous were perhaps more the worse for wear than the men of the camels. There was a good deal of patching to be done, in which sail cloth and slabs of biscuit tins figured conspicuously. Christmas Day was nigh; considerable brushing up for the occasion was necessary. Even puddings were made—the day would not be complete in camp without that luxury—and there was church parade which preceded their consumption. There were double rations of rum and tobacco served out, and the men took it easy, for there was big and ticklish work in store for them, and it might turn out to be the last Christmas for many.

The camel is mostly a beast of burden. You cannot make a pet of him. Young, old or middle-aged, he is the same unsociable, awkward, indifferent, grousing beast. He is unpleasant to ride. His eye

is calm and doe-like, but hides an uneven, fretful temper. I was puzzling myself one morning about how I could convey an idea to the readers of my journal of the manners and customs of this beast, when I chanced to overhear a soldier singing a verse from a song that was in those days familiar in the mouths of the Ethiopians of any English watering-place:

"When he's up he's up; when he's down he's down; when he's only half-way up he's neither up nor down."

Surely the author of these beautiful lines must have had the camel in his eye when the inspiration struck him; for nothing can be more expressive or to the point in describing the movements of a camel when you are about to mount him. When he's up it's all right; when he's down it's just as comfortable; but when he's only half-way is the critical jerking and almost neck-breaking moment.

A camel will start from his sitting posture by rising on his fore knees, first jerking you violently back on to his haunches. As he lifts his hind-quarters one is thrown suddenly forward. It is at this moment—when all seems to be lost, and a close proximity of your nose to the dust must be your lot—that he invariably staggers to his fore-feet, though keeping you hanging on more or less in suspense according to his amiability of temper. When the brute is up safe and sound and begins to walk there is a sort of four-time jolting movement—a shift forward, then one to the left, one to the right, then to the rear, the effect of which is heightened according to the haste of the camel. It was computed by a calculating young Scotch subaltern *en route*, counting by the

telegraph poles, that a human being mounted on a camel is subjected to twelve hundred and eighty-five distinct jerks per mile. As several of us suffered the second day out from severe stiff necks, which our doctor did not attribute to a cold, it is more than possible that the young sub.'s total was correct. The blue-jackets, who can generally adapt themselves to novel situations, took some time before they understood this beast of burden. They would sit sideways on its hump and work the nose rope as if they were pulling the rudder lines. I heard Jack grumbling one day:

"Why, the poets call this 'ere thing the ship of the desert. I calls it hardship."

"Well, what's the matter, Jack?" said I.

"Why, sir, the tackle of my saddle is all adrift. I don't think this gear has got any stern lashings. The ship of the desert! Why, with a new set of boilers, and it don't matter how much coal yer put in her bunkers, she wouldn't go more than two knots. And look at that funnel of a neck for a forced draught, too! No wonder Charley rides a moke, sir. He knows a thing or two, does Beresford." (Lord Charles Beresford chose a donkey for this desert march.)

The troops kept their spirits up by chaffing each other.

"Ha! What would my poor mother say if she was to see me now? Why, when I was a-laying at Woolwich she used to bring me jam tarts. How many pulls to a quart would ye take now, Bill—eh?"

"Why, I couldn't drink a bottle of shammy unless it was well frappy."

I will not go into further details of our twelve days

march across the desert. It will suffice to say that from the conditions under which it was carried out it was the most remarkable of any desert march which has taken place by the British in the Soudan, and probably that has ever occurred in the annals of war. Never was heroism less daunted by the most cruel hardships. Only a short time since a Russian officer, who would be little likely to flatter our national courage, compared it to the exploits of Xerxes imbued with the spirit of the Spartans who died in the Pass of Thermopylæ.

I will come to the most trying and heroic episode in this courageous though fruitless struggle for General Gordon's sake. It was after the bloody fight of Abu Klea —after our weary and thirsty night's march towards the Nile—when shortly after dawn the mud-baked walls of Metemneh glistened with the early sun out of the mists enshrouding the Nile Valley. Presently the low sound of tom-toms came from the direction of the town. Outside its walls, across the clearings, down into the mimosa bush, thousands and thousands of the enemy hurried to intercept our advance to the water. Completely surrounded by the Arabs, we formed a zareba, and simply at bay we fought, almost hopelessly, against enormous odds till two in the afternoon. General Stewart had been wounded early in the action. Poor Cameron, the *Standard* correspondent, now met his fate. Stretcher-bearers and doctors were busy at work in our little enclosure. The band of death grew closer and closer, with a tighter, yet tighter grip. Six hundred fierce Arab horsemen now hovered on our flanks and rear. Something must be done. In a few hours water would fail us entirely.

Sir Charles Wilson, who took command when Stewart

went down, resolved to march a square to the river, force his way through the enemy, build a fort by the water, and return for the survivors left behind in the zareba of commissariat boxes built round the guns and the Gardners. A force of 1,200 men was at last formed up. I decided to go with this brave little band, on which the whole safety of the brigade depended. I took my pony with me. He was fearfully thirsty, the poor brute not having been watered for an age. I thought one of us might reach the Nile and get a drink that day. Down at the horses' lines I found St. Leger Herbert, the correspondent for the *Morning Post*, getting something from his valise. We walked together towards the square. He wore a red jacket, which the enemy seemed to mark by the hum of bullets around us. So hot was the fire as we hurried towards the clearing in which our men were forming up, that I chaffingly suggested that he had better continue the journey in his shirt sleeves. Receiving no reply, I looked round, and found him rolling in the sand with a bullet through his brain.

The square slowly moved off. The whole fire of the Arabs was now concentrated on us. Men fell thickly around, and were hastily taken to the zareba, which was still within easy reach. As we entered the mimosa valley the bushes seemed alive with musketry. The clear, steady voice of Colonel Boscawen (now Lord Falmouth) was heard above the terrible din. "The square will halt!" "The square will fire a volley at two hundred yards! Ready!" Then from front and flank belched forth fire and smoke.

After firing one round, we would move forward again at the same funeral pace, the bearers now picking up

our wounded and putting them into the cacolets, or camel chairs. Thus we slowly moved through this veritable valley of the shadow of death, for there was not a man in the square that was not bespattered with the blood of some comrade who had fallen by the way. Casualties were becoming so frequent that stretchers and camel chairs were soon filled, and things began to look something like a forlorn hope if we wished to reach the Nile that day. My camel boy came rolling under the belly of the camel with a bullet in his heart, and at the same moment the animal was hit in the neck. I heard the twang of the bullet and expected to see the poor beast stumble at once; but he simply turned his long neck in my direction, and opened his gazelle-like eyes to their full extent, as much as to say, "Did you do that?" Then a shiver passed through his body, and he lumbered steadily forward, continuing to chew the cud as if nothing had happened.

The air now became so thick with the hum of the bullets that it might have been expected that the little force would be almost annihilated. Lord Arthur Somerset, Count Gleichen, Lord Airlie, and several other officers met with casualties, and a bullet passed through the rumpled folds of one of my putties. Then, all of a sudden, the firing entirely ceased, and we found ourselves in a sandy hollow with less scrub about. So sudden was the cessation of the enemy's fire that we looked at each other and wondered at the silence. We did not wonder long.

Now from our zareba far in our rear Norton's guns opened fire. Then a shell whistled over our heads, bursting above the ridge in front of us. The square, on this signal to look out, was immediately ordered to halt.

Almost instantly afterwards points of ragged banners rose up on the sky line. Our men gave a grunt of satisfaction, for the enemy had now taken some tangible form. There was no more galling fire from the bush. Here we were in the open, on equal terms with the foe, and there was a twitch of the shoulders of each man as he settled his heels firmly in the loose sand, wiped the dust from the lock of his rifle, and stood ready for the onslaught. If ever I had for a moment doubted the possibility of our little force getting through to the river, this action of Tommy Atkins convinced me that we should reach the Nile that night. The skulking skirmishers of the bush ceased firing. For a moment there was a dead silence. Then, with tom-toms beating and loud shouts and yells, the Mahdi's spearmen bounded on—not running, but leaping forward—brandishing their weapons, which mirrored shifting lines of light as the sun glinted on the balanced spear heads. The emirs, leading the van, followed by their standard bearers, hurried on. The masses closed round. Then from the square, when the Arabs were within three hundred yards, our men, as if they were at an At Home field-day, steadily poured volley after volley of deadly hail into the reckless foe. When the dense fog of smoke cleared away there was nothing left of this bold charge but its dead and dying. A few slightly wounded struggled on to meet their death.

The sudden collapse of the attack was almost beyond realisation. Some five thousand warriors—they looked like a swarm of locusts enveloping our little fighting force of twelve hundred—had been driven off the field by a handful of British soldiers worn out with fatigue, racked with thirst, an army of mere rags and bones.

Powder begrimed, blood bespattered, foul with the paucity of water, Tommy looked at his best to me that day. For a few moments there was hardly a word uttered in our little square. Then burst forth a cheer that went up from that valley from parched and thirsty throats. Weak and feeble as it was, every man's heart was in it. It might have answered for a prayer. There was about it an unmistakable tone of thankfulness for our safe delivery from those merciless hordes that day. We now marched for the waters. Only a few shots worried us from the bushes, and these gradually died away as we neared the Nile. Some of the men, overwrought with emotion, embraced each other. The parched lips of the wretched wounded were moistened with the remaining dregs of the water-skins, and we then moved unmolested towards the river.

The sun had now disappeared, but the faint light of the young moon showed us in the distant gloaming a wide streak of silvery sheen gleaming up from out the dull grey of the desert. It was the glorious water.

"The Nile! the Nile!" burst from every throat.

The soldiers of Xenophon shouted "Thalassa! Thalassa!" when they saw the ocean on whose tide they were to come home after their long, weary pilgrimage; but to us the flowing river which we greeted with glad cries of "The Nile! the Nile!" was more than was the Pontus to Xenophon's Greeks. That river was to us the veritable water of life; but for that precious current of fresh water not a man would have survived to return to that ocean across whose bosom lay the path to home.

The square was made to halt for a few minutes; the wounded were lifted from their litters to see the

river they were so dearly suffering for—the precious liquid that was to soften their caking wounds and quench their feverish thirst. With greedy looks we longed to dip in that silvery mass. But we must wait the return of the scouts to report "All's well" in front; for they had crept down to the shore to see if the enemy intended to try and snatch from us at the last moment the prize we had so dearly fought for. I could not help admiring the discipline of the British soldier within the very grasp of that for which he had been marching and fighting for the last twelve days, and almost mad with thirst. There he stood, patiently waiting till he was ordered to be watered in companies. Instead of a maddened rabble tearing down to the river, he went down to the water waiting his turn in this way. But all this fighting, all this maddening thirst, all this waste of precious blood and weeks of misery, availed but little. Our advent on the Nile was the signal for Gordon's doom.

The steamers that arrived two days after our advent on the river were eventually sent on to Khartoum, with a small force of red-jackets under Sir Charles Wilson. One morning early, before the moon began to wane, I was awakened by a sentry whose post was near me.

"There's a boat coming this way, sir. Do you think I ought to challenge her?"

"Certainly."

"But," replied he, "I have no orders to challenge boats, sir; think I had better ask my sergeant."

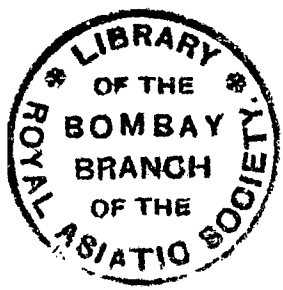
Presently the sound of rowlocks came down the stream. Then a boat flashed across the shimmering band of moonlight.

"Halt! Who goes there?" shouted the sentry.

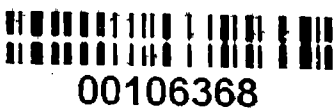
"Friend!" came a voice from the boat.

It was the voice of young Stuart Wortley. I awakened my friend Harry Pearse, of the *Daily News*, and told him of the mysterious coming. We feared the worst. When the sun rose on our camp, so hushed was the little fort that morning that the *reveille* brought no wonted stir. From mouth to mouth was whispered:

"Khartoum! Khartoum is fallen!"



PRINTED BY CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED, LA BELLE SAUVAGE, LONDON, E.C.


00106368

Digitized with financial assistance from
Shri Brihad Bhartiya Samaj
on 31 October, 2019